Film Quarterly

FILM CULTURE | DIGITAL | BOOKS & DVDS

KATHRYN BIGELOW

ROBINSON IN RUINS

VISIONARY TELEVISION

MOTHER

Winter 2010 Volume 64 Number 2
$11.99 USA

CONTRIBUTORS

Caetlin Benson-Allott teaches at Georgetown University.

Leo Braudy wrote about Clint Eastwood in the summer 2007 issue.

Joshua Clover is the author of *Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About* (University of California Press).

Nataša Ďurovičová is co-editor of *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (Routledge).

Lucy Fischer is the author of *American Cinema in the 1920s: Themes and Variations* (Rutgers University Press).

Mark Fisher blogs at k-punk.abstractdynamics.org.

Martin Fradley teaches at the University of Manchester, U.K.

Lucas Hilderbrand wrote about YouTube in the fall 2007 issue.

William Johnson lives in Yonkers, New York.

Charlie Keil teaches at the University of Toronto.

Edward Lawrenson lives in London.

Suzanne Leonard teaches at Simmons College.

Scott MacDonald teaches at Hamilton College and Colgate University.

D. A. Miller is the author of 8½ (BFI Film Classics).

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith is a former editor of *Screen*.

William Paul is the author of *Ernst Lubitsch's American Comedy* (Columbia University Press).

Nina Power is the author of *One-Dimensional Woman* (Zero Books, 2009).

Joanna E. Rapf teaches at the University of Oklahoma.

Paul Julian Smith is the author of *Spanish Screen Fiction: Between Cinema and Television* (Liverpool University Press).

David Sterritt is chair of the National Society of Film Critics.

Garrett Stewart wrote about *Waltz with Bashir* in the spring 2010 issue.

Paul Thomas teaches at the University of California, Berkeley.

Alberto Toscano is the author of *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (Verso).

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

EDITOR Rob White

CONSULTING EDITOR Ann Martin

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR Matthew H. Bernstein

EDITORIAL BOARD Christine Acham, Leo Braudy, Ernest Callenbach, Joshua Clover, Brian Henderson, Marsha Kinder, Akira Mizuta Lippit, D. A. Miller, Linda Williams

WRITERS-AT-LARGE James Naremore, Nina Power, Jonathan Rosenbaum, J. M. Tyree

CHIEF BOOK CRITIC David Sterritt

DESIGN Irene Imfeld

TYPESETTING Dickie Magidoff

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Rick Altman, Dudley Andrew, Caetlin Benson-Allott, Charlotte Brunsdon, Mark Fisher, Jane Gaines, Lalitha Gopalan, Tom Gunning, Charlie Keil, James Naremore, Abé Mark Nornes, Nina Power, Joanna Rapf, A. L. Rees, B. Ruby Rich, Vivian Sobchack, Janet Staiger, Garrett Stewart, Paul Thomas, James S. Williams, Emma Wilson

EDITOR'S READERS Richard Brown, Rob Cheek

COVER PHOTO Kathryn Bigelow during the filming of *The Hurt Locker.* Courtesy of Summit Entertainment.

EDITOR'S THANKS Heather Salazar, Zoe Flower, Sue Porter, Magda Stroe

Film Quarterly (ISSN 0015-1386, e-ISSN 1533-8630) is published quarterly by the University of California Press, Journals and Digital Publishing, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223. Periodicals postage paid at Berkeley, CA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Film Quarterly*, University of California Press, Journals and Digital Publishing, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223. E-mail: customerservice@ucpressjournals.com.

Instructions for authors can be found on page 92.

See www.ucpressjournals.com for single issue and subscription orders, and claims information. Domestic claims for nonreceipt of issues should be made within 90 days of the mail date; overseas claims within 180 days. Mail dates can be checked at: www.ucpressjournals.com/ucpress.asp?page=ReleaseSchedule. University of California Press does not begin accepting claims for an issue until thirty (30) days after the mail date. Out of print issues and volumes are available from Periodicals Service Company, 11 Main Street, Germantown, NY 12526-5635. Phone number: (518) 537-4700. Fax number: (518) 537-5899. Web site: www.periodicals.com.

Inquiries about advertising can be sent to adsales@ucpressjournals.com. For complete abstracting and indexing coverage for the journal, please visit www.ucpressournals.com. All other inquiries can be directed to customerservice@ucpressjournals.com.

Copying and permissions notice: Authorization to copy article content beyond fair use (as specified in Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law) for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by The Regents of the University of California for libraries and other users, provided that they are registered with and pay the specified fee through the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), www.copyright.com. To reach the CCC's Customer Service Department, phone (978) 750-8400 or write to info@copyright.com. For permission to distribute electronically, republish, resell, or repurpose material, and to purchase article offprints, use the CCC's Rightslink service, available on Caliber at http://caliber.ucpress.net. Submit all other permissions and licensing inquiries through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp, or via e-mail: journalspermissions@ucpress.edu.

Printed by Allen Press, Lawrence, KS.

© 2010 The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved.

Film Quarterly
Winter 2010 Volume 64 Number 2

TALKING POINTS

19 **OSHIMA REVISITED**
Geoffrey Nowell-Smith admires the complex skepticism of a great Japanese director

24 **THE ART OF DISTRIBUTION: VIDEO ON DEMAND**
Lucas Hilderbrand reports on digital innovations in arthouse distribution

29 ***NEAR DARK*: AN APPRECIATION**
Leo Braudy looks back at Kathryn Bigelow's revisionist vampire film

FEATURES

33 **UNDOING VIOLENCE: POLITICS, GENRE, AND DURATION IN KATHRYN BIGELOW'S CINEMA**
Caetlin Benson-Allott surveys an innovative career in and out of Hollywood

44 **GHOST OF THE FIELDS: AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK KEILLER**
Nina Power talks to the British film essayist about *Robinson in Ruins*

50 **AVANT-DOC: EIGHT INTERSECTIONS**
Scott MacDonald reflects on links between documentary and avant-garde filmmaking traditions

58 **VISIONARY TELEVISION: *WORLD ON A WIRE* AND *ARTEMIS 81***
Mark Fisher revisits television dramas from Rainer Werner Fassbinder and David Rudkin

www.filmquarterly.org
www.ucpressjournals.com/fq

DEPARTMENTS

4 **EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK**
NEW RELEASES, CROSS-REFERENCES
Cristi Puiu discusses *Aurora*

8 **MARX AND COCA-COLA**
NEW RELEASES IN THEORY
Joshua Clover the BP oil-spill video

10 **NEW YORK NOTEBOOK**
NEW RELEASES, REPERTORY
William Johnson *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child, Kings of Pastry*

12 **SCREENINGS**
FESTIVALS, NEW RELEASES, TELEVISION
Paul Julian Smith *Meek's Cutoff, Post Mortem*

14 **SECOND TIME AROUND**
DVD REISSUES
D. A. Miller *La Femme infidèle, Psycho*

64 **BEDSIT CINEMA**
NEW DVDS
Nataša Ďurovičová and Garrett Stewart *Mother*

69 **FESTIVAL NOTEBOOK**
WROCŁAW, REYKJAVIK
Edward Lawrenson *Mundane History, Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons*

72 **LONDON NOTEBOOK**
FESTIVAL REPORT
Alberto Toscano *Draquila: Italy Trembles, Inside Job*

74 **ENCOUNTER**
FILMMAKER INTERVIEWS
Olivier Assayas discusses *Carlos*

90 **INTERTITLES**
FILM BOOKS
Paul Thomas *Everything is Cinema, A Short History of "Cahiers du cinéma"*

BOOK REVIEWS

78 **David Sterritt**
Four Books about Terrence Malick

81 **William Paul**
Comedy Incarnate: Buster Keaton, Physical Humor, and Bodily Coping by Noël Carroll | *City Lights* by Charles J. Maland

83 **Suzanne Leonard**
Sex and the City by Deborah Jermyn | *Beautiful TV: The Art and Argument of "Ally McBeal"* by Greg M. Smith

85 **Lucy Fischer**
Screening Sex by Linda Williams

86 **Joanna E. Rapf**
Machine-Age Comedy by Michael North

87 **Charlie Keil**
Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema by Dan Streible

88 **Martin Fradley**
Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema by Geoff King

CRISTI PUIU DISCUSSES *AURORA*

Aurora, the outstanding new film by the director of *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*, begins as the lead character, Viorel, wakes up before dawn in an apartment in Bucharest, Romania. Played brilliantly by Cristi Puiu himself, Viorel has a quiet intensity that is immediately troubling. When he and the woman he was sleeping with, Gina, have breakfast, the way he looks at her is frighteningly cold. His monotonous speech compounds the impression of menace. Gina explains that her daughter made an ingenuous remark at school about the Little Red Riding Hood fairytale: "The wolf eats granny. Then he puts on her clothes. So when the hunter cuts her out of the wolf, she should be naked." It is an apposite way to start: the domestic conversation is mundane, but violence lurks in it.

The nature of the domesticity, though, is somewhat mysterious. Later Viorel comes back to this residence and the door is answered by a man who appears to be Gina's husband. Viorel has to wait outside until she emerges to give him a strip of unidentified pills. On the basis of the opening scene, it could easily have been assumed that Viorel and Gina are married; on the basis of the later one, it seems she is his drug dealer. (In due course it emerges that Viorel is divorced.) Throughout *Aurora*, background detail is purposefully withheld. In an unnerving scene, Viorel bullies the staff of a boutique in his search for someone called Andreea, but it is never spelled out who she is. When I first watched *Aurora*, I gradually entered a state of sustained anxiety. After a second viewing, I realized that my distress was in part a result of the way Puiu pares down his fiction, rationing the story information.

Viorel is about to leave his job as a consultant metallurgical engineer. He retrieves belongings from the factory office and ungraciously collects a debt from a co-worker. He then visits another colleague, who sympathizes with him: "They really played you around. Must come from higher up." If this comment does not persuade the audience that Viorel is unstable, then the fact that he has come to pick up a gun will presumably do so. This cruel, icy man will shortly obtain another weapon and then move around the city on a murder spree whose motivation is only unveiled right at the end of the film, when he gives a statement to the police. "You seem to think you understand," he murmurs. "You seem to think you follow what I'm saying. And that scares me. I don't know if you understand." It is a chilling remark that aligns insight with psychopathology.

Sometimes a character in *Aurora* will wander out of a room, leaving the fixed camera to frame a peripheral space. What the audience sees is often obstructed and the violence that occurs is always seen, if it is glimpsed at all, from a distance. The most striking camera movement occurs when Viorel walks up a staircase. The camera follows him until he reaches the next floor and then traces his path from below, along the ceiling. The attack that ensues is only heard. What kind of viewer experience is involved here? In the press book for *Aurora*'s screening at Cannes this year, Puiu is quoted as saying, "I told the cameramen to follow the character, and to look at him with a feeling that resembles a father watching his child learn to walk." It is a curious pronouncement because the restricted viewpoints emphasize the audience's inability to intervene or even to know what is happening. It would, in my opinion, be better to say that the camera occupies the perspective of a scared child, frozen by the sight of daily life being interrupted by bewildering or atrocious events. There is, however, a further complication: more than once, the camera records Viorel spying (and his targets include his own children). It is not easy therefore to separate the vantage points of horrified witness and furtive stalker, and this is another reason why *Aurora* is so upsetting.

When Viorel fires his shotgun several times in a suburban home, dogs bark in alarm but no one else seems to notice. This detail suggests the extent to which the world of *Aurora* is fragmented. In *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*, the dying man is progressively stripped of the components of his communal being—home, community, family, speech—as he gets absorbed into the Bucharest hospital system. Through what can be called a technique of dissection, Puiu bares the relationship between a person and social institutions, and between self and state in post-communist Romania. The extent to which *Aurora* partakes of the same inquiry is harder to judge, if only because Viorel has such contempt for those around him. He already lives on the margins of society, as is made strikingly clear by contrast when he visits a bustling apartment full of chatter and commotion.

I met Cristi Puiu on October 25, during the London Film Festival (October 13–28). I wanted to ask him about the

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 4–7 ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.04

Cristi Puiu as Viorel
Aurora. Photo: Coproduction Office.

way *Aurora* inhibits understanding, and the degree to which it is a political film.[†]

Rob White: *Aurora* purposely omits background information and so to an unusual degree the audience is denied understanding of how characters relate to one another.

Cristi Puiu: You're asking me if I have this information? It happens that I have. There are some directors who would play with this question, to create mystery. But for me a film has to be logical. So I have all this information and not only that, but I shot it. I have six hours of film. Remember that I am a storyteller and one of the first lessons of cinema is that it is an art of ellipsis. In this film, I didn't hide things. I observed and then kept just moments that I thought were revelatory for the story I'm going to tell.

Toward the end of the film Viorel goes to a boutique looking for Andreea. Who is Andreea?

In the film I'm observing somebody for thirty-six hours and so it's certain that he's going to meet people that you don't know, whose identity will be unclear. And in this situation he's looking for a friend of his ex-wife. He's in the process of finding "the guilty ones" in the tragic ending of his marriage. But it wouldn't work to add lines like: "I'm looking for Andreea, my wife's friend." It isn't a traditional film like that.

What about Gina, Viorel's lover, whom we see in the first scene and who later gives him some pills?

She's giving him Xanax. It's important to point out that she's one of the doctors in *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*—it's the same Gina from that film. And Puşa's [Viorel's mother] next-door neighbor is the nurse from the ambulance in *Lazarescu*. It's not just the same actress. (And I wanted this nurse to have her own Mr. Lazarescu at home—the old man who offers Viorel the drink.) When I started my ongoing project, *Six Stories from the Bucharest Outskirts*, I wanted to be inside a construction in the manner of Balzac. Or like Truffaut: *Stolen Kisses*, *Love on the Run*. And Viorel's upstairs neighbor, the woman, is another nurse from *Lazarescu*. I wanted to mix these two films about death (one man receiving death, the other giving death). So Gina's a general practitioner and maybe Viorel originally went to see her to tell her he's having problems with his prostate; their relationship has something to do with his hypochondriac tendencies.

Viorel tries to get along with being divorced. For example, he's trying to renovate his apartment and to start a new life. And as part of that he's having this affair, which doesn't really work, even though they might look to the audience like husband and wife. In the script their relationship is explained, but I didn't want it finally to be so explicit. While writing the script, I was caught somehow in a traditional model of storytelling—like from Aristotle's *Poetics*. But I don't believe in this! I think cinema is more than storytelling

and so I had to get rid of some things. The single alternative formula that I could articulate at that moment was: observing life. I had to find a way of telling a fictional story in the fashion of observational documentary. So these moments that are happening in the life of an individual can't be explicit for a third person, for the spectator. We see things in front of our eyes and we jump to conclusions. We choose to come to the conclusions that we like, the version of events that suits us.

Usually when you're delivering your story and you're honest with yourself, your message can't be clear. You must stay within a perimeter of facts and allow the audience to play the role of the detective. It's what we do when we're reading books and watching films. We want to be a step ahead of the story; it's a natural tendency, like making predictions. If you look at the newspaper, you may have a feeling of living in an era of predictions—everyone is making predictions.

But how can you make it so the camera has no preconceptions or there's no anticipation in the movement of the camera? We make anticipations all the time. The camera can't be stupid. It's not just an artificial recording device. There's a human being observing. Cinema is an instrument for investigating the real, for investigating life. OK, so there's another question that arises, which is: why fiction films? It's because fictions come from our minds. And so they're like evidence—evidence of a certain way of thinking about the world. The camera isn't moving accidentally; there's an intention. So cinema can be a kind of anthropological device for you to look at the world outside yourself and the world inside yourself, inside your head, which fiction films allow you to do.

Like other recent Romanian films, *Aurora* seems to suggest that there is no comprehensive viewpoint. There is no god's-eye view, no authoritative party opinion. The film insists on the restriction of perspective. Is this perhaps a humanist response to the loss of any totalizing ideology?

Yes. Another, maybe simpler way to say it is that I assume that it's like the audience has been to a place that I'm talking about. So I can abbreviate the story I'll tell my interlocutor, relying on this prior knowledge. I'm not going to go into all the details of where the station or the airport or the hotel are. With a lover, in a couple, or with your very close friends you can exchange ideas without announcing all the words and long phrases. We can even understand just by looking at one another. I didn't go so far, but I assumed this position. Because there's something beyond the film. It's not just a one-way ticket; it's not just that you have an idea or have a story to tell. It's like you start to build a bridge from here and somebody else is building a bridge from the other side and we meet in the middle somehow.

So what is at stake is a kind of intimacy? It is an interesting idea, given Viorel's coldness.

Another thing to say is that there are new things that emerge while I'm making a film. I was asking myself what the reasons are for somebody killing someone else. I didn't have the reason and then the reason came from the story. You remember at the beginning Gina and Viorel discuss Little Red Riding Hood and what happens to the clothes of the grandmother who's eaten by the wolf. Then, later, Viorel tells the stepfather to stop wearing his father's old coat. And it's like the stepfather is the wolf and Viorel with his rifle is the hunter, who's going to kill wolves who change their clothes, change their identities. This is a guy who has trouble with others' identities. A wife is a wife, not an ex-wife or a divorcée. She has to be his wife. He has a very, very rigid vision of the world. That's why I ended up putting this story of Little Red Riding Hood at the beginning of the film—in order to have a reason, a trigger for his actions. He was preparing for a long time, so why this day? Maybe he was waiting for a confirmation. Maybe that seems very complicated. But that's why the film is called *Aurora*. I don't think that everything is black and white. Aurora—dawn—is the moment when night and day meet. In French this moment is called *entre chien et loup* [between dog and wolf]. I'm the author of the film, I'm telling the story, but I'm also trying to understand this story. I have some facts only and the right way for me to understand something about what I'm doing—and about life itself—is to accept that to some extent I don't know. But it's very difficult because most people are looking for answers.

You position the camera in such a way as to accentuate a sense of distance from the action, notably when the camera fails to follow Viorel upstairs. We do not see the attack that subsequently occurs. Again there is an impediment to the viewer's knowledge.

At the style level, the formal level, you have to have "Aurora" as well. Thirty-six hours in the life of an individual cannot be clear. Even if you shot it all, there would still be question marks. Thirty-six hours of observations: some things are clear, some things are not. From time to time people disappear behind walls. You hear or you don't hear, you see or you don't see. Your condition as a human being imposes certain restrictions on what can be understood. We don't have two-way vision like a chicken does! There's that statement from Arnheim in his *Film as Art* that a filmmaker is obliged to choose things from reality and if you choose one thing you don't choose something else. If you point the camera in this direction, you are going to lose what's happening behind the camera. This is the condition of the filmmaker. So I decided for every scene to have one shot from a very precise position—not in order to expose everything to camera, but

Stalker
Aurora. Courtesy of London Film Festival.

to cover the space logically. If someone has to go from the armchair in the living room to the toilet, then maybe you can still get something from the sound of the flush. Cinema allows you to do this, to vary elements in order to build up the cinematographic sentence. I don't know if I've succeeded in this but the statement I want to make is that life is more important than cinema. I think that life is more important than cinema.

Viorel is a monster. Sometimes he seems to me like a bird and then sometimes like a machine—his voice never rises, he is almost like The Terminator. But is there also a political dimension to this character? He acts according to his own laws, he has no sense of community or belonging. Is he the personification of a kind of completely unconstrained post-communist individualism?

This is not completely wrong and not completely right. I was asking myself the same questions. But you know at the end of the nineteenth century there was an author called Pompiliu Eliade, who published a book in Paris about the French influence in Romania. Of course there was no communist Romania then and you can see from his book that Romania at the end of the nineteenth century was what it is now. I was asking myself why people are so individualistic and I don't have an answer to it. It could be about communism. During the communist era, in newspapers you had this statement of solidarity: "proletarians of the world unite!" I suppose finally the political statement of the film is that in order to survive, to get along with others, you have to negotiate and make compromises. In the artistic domain, it's regarded as the worst thing. All the heroes we take as models are uncompromising and this is the fascist dimension of the thing. Viorel is like this. He's the one who's going to impose his philosophy on the world without negotiation.

In order to live inside a community, you have to make compromises and concede things. And you have to somehow be confirmed by the institutions of the state, education first of all. It's an important question you ask and I realize that it could possibly be an answer to all the killings. An individual who is really stuck in his own philosophy, who isn't flexible or supple enough to make compromises, may end up killing somebody, killing himself, or leaving the community. So telling this story involves looking at some extreme answers to the question of how life in a community is possible.

†Thanks to Sue Porter for arranging the interview and to Cristina Catalina for her excellent interpreting.

AN AMERICAN VIDEO

To say that the great American screen event of 2010 was a piece of avant-garde video is probably to do it a disservice.

Certainly the video in question shared various characteristics with avant-garde or experimental video. Foremost among these is sheer length. Even at low resolution (which is all it really asks for, formally), it would occupy more than a few DVDs, if it were available in that format. As far as I know, it is not. It was a live feed, albeit impossible to see in person. That was part of the concept. It was something like a video happening. You saw it or you didn't. It swiftly exceeded the first physical barrier of viewing, which is the wall of sleep: no matter one's attention, the possibility of a singular and seamless viewing vanished after five or twenty hours.

One scarcely needs Henri Bergson to realize that such a duration—even if one resolves to watch only a portion of the full opus—requires something other than a conventional phenomenology of attention: *a different sense of time*, per the critical commonplace, inevitably mobilizing the rhetoric of modifying the viewer's perceptual experience—of reattuning, at least for a time, the sensorium itself.

But such reattunements, such adjustments in one's relation to reality, do not arise from the simple fact of duration. If one were to edit the full run of *The Simpsons* into a single event, it would approach 200 hours; *Guiding Light* and *As The World Turns*, considerably longer. Watching any of these would require no small degree of *Sitzfleisch*, no doubt. But the ebb and flow on which narrative is premised would surely preserve fairly conventional modes of attention. No, it must not only be inhumanly long; to break through the barrier of normal viewing, of daily visual cognition, it must also be nonnarrative, perhaps even nonrepresentational.

And so it seemed to be. Boring, enervating even, for the most part, or on most days. Some days it was fascinating, soothing, hypnagogic. And some days you just couldn't stand to watch. There was time enough for all of this. It was about 124,000 minutes long, though we never bothered to do an exact count, as far as I know. I say "we" because I could feel the plural, even though I watched it almost always alone.

I could feel the plural, the others watching with me. This is a common enough experience, the lonely crowd gathered around a million televisions, the distributed mass audience of a pop song playing on the radio in the middle of the night. Such apparitional community is not intrinsic to video art, but in this case the event of it had been extensively covered in the media, and it was available online at multiple sites, and moreover, some of the sites had counters that indicated how many viewers were riding that channel at any given time. The numbers were relatively small, seven or forty-six or 193, but they added up.

I watched mostly by myself, in an otherwise empty room, feeling the plural but physically solitary, and the emptiness seemed to be an effect of the video. When it was on, it was hard to take anything else seriously, all the material objects nearby seemed to lose saliency. It was always on.

Each viewer saw it a little differently, but we could agree on certain aspects. We talked about it sometimes, when we weren't watching, in hushed and flat tones. As with many contemporary spectacles of disaster, Don DeLillo seemed to have foreseen certain elements. The spectral fascination, the suspicion that one is seeing evidence of something terrible but somehow indeterminate.

It was, basically, a slowly billowing cloud that seemed to ascend from the lower portion of the screen and dissipate upward. The image was, for the most part, green, in differing degrees. It depended on your monitor's chroma, and the green was not terribly saturated—in some places it was almost colorless, but because there were no other colors, it still took on a tremendous, weak intensity. It was 2000 hours of something terrible about to happen, an anxiously diffuse scene without plot or players except for rare moments when something unusual would cross the screen, similarly slowed and incomprehensible but with more defined edges, moving with vague deliberation but without clear purpose, and then it too would be gone.

This had no scale to speak of. The changes in the green billowing, the emptily evocative variations of the cloud, eventually dissolved the ability to perceive an image. Image itself was something that leaked away ceaselessly. It was impossible to distinguish the edges of the shape as they diffused at the frontiers of the image, feathery, fluid, and were replaced at more or less the same rate, inside going imperceptibly outside the borders of the form, even as the latest inside issued forth.

Narrative and not, representational and not. It grew abstract, but this wasn't its own quality. "We can think ab-

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 8–9, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.8

Floating in the end times

stractly about the world," writes Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* (Routledge), "only to the degree to which the world itself has already become abstract." And maybe that gets to the heart of it: this was the final becoming-abstract of the world, 240x240 pixels, sickly night-scope green. Of course one could switch to full-screen view, pixelating the image, which just drove it even further toward abstraction.

The boxy symmetry seemed important. Occasionally a film scholar meditating on the epic breadth of *Alexander Nevsky* wonders what poor Eisenstein, trapped in the 1.33:1 aspect ratio, could have done had he only had CinemaScope at his disposal. Eisenstein himself, however, wrote at one point that cinema should adopt a 1:1 aspect ratio, providing more compositional rigor and donating a greater objectivity to the image. This is a truth of the Soviet avant-garde in the early part of the revolution before Zhdanov came along with the Socialist Realism edict. You can see it in Malevich's paintings and El Lissitzky's designs, the lure of absolute orthogonality: the world is new; we have harnessed the powers of production; the machine will now be the code for organic form; it is the seizing of necessity from the gods and ideological mirages; the real of history can now stand before us revealed.

All of that crouched inside Eisenstein's box, Malevich's "Black Square," the formalism adequate to a new life. But that was a different abstraction entirely, the abstraction of world-making, almost a century ago. The avant-garde of the beginning. This is what a certain strain of video art is always trying to recapture: an opening, an escape from the sentimental realism of the bourgeoisie, and from the power of productive forces looming over us—hoping somehow to leap across the yawning, sullen gap from this moment to that new world. Another strand of the avant-garde is untimely, divorced from any beginning but its own. It takes its force from wilfully ignoring historical struggle, and proceeds by pretending that invention is itself pure and autonomous, that it doesn't takes its force from the situation in which it arrives.

This long piece was of the first sort, I think, but inverted. The small green video and its fixed camera stood the dream of Eisenstein and Malevich on its head. We had lost control of abstraction and necessity both and now they just . . . *happened*, unremittingly, slowly, a patient machinic disaster that had escaped human grasp and human scope. This was not history's laws coming into view for us to grab and turn in a direction of our choosing, but a different, alien objectivity: a process that coiled together with time and unspooled without us. It was an image, one might eventually conclude, of loss itself, of the ebbing away of whatever it was that abstraction promised in 1920.

There is something right about this. But not everything. The video was, after all, not abstract in its conception. Later it would turn out that there were much higher-resolution images, but that they were being withheld from the viewing audience by the artist, or at least the camera owner: British Petroleum. The billow might have been visible then as something entirely concrete: oil leaking from an underwater well. Representational, even narrative. One could, if so desired, gather the daily reports on gallons spilled, and other specific details, though the figures changed so swiftly and so wildly that it was hard to feel the hardness of facts. They were as billowy as anything else.

And the concrete keeps folding back into the abstract, the metaphorical, as easy as remembering that the French word for gasoline is *essence*. This isn't a necessary reminder; no one misses that oil is first among equals in the court of commodities. It is the imperial good. So the video's green twilight of production tells a story after all. This was empire leaking away in real time, a ceaseless hemorrhage of essence which was also a ceaseless hemorrhage of image that destroys the image, overwhelming and empty, a formal feeling, the avant-garde of the end.

JOSHUA CLOVER is a 2010–11 Fellow at the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University.

PESOS, PAPARAZZO, PASTRY, PAINTING

Prisoner 13 **(Fernando de Fuentes, 1933)**
Smash His Camera **(Leon Gast)**
Kings of Pastry **(Chris Hegedus, D. A. Pennebaker)**
Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child **(Tamra Davis)**

Screened in the Masterworks strand at the New York Film Festival (September 24–October 10), Fernando de Fuentes' early sound drama still carries a surprisingly strong impact. Its fictional actions are set amid the tensions of the Mexican Revolution, with a group of left-wing agitators rounded up and imprisoned by Colonel Carrasco for eventual execution by firing squad. Carrasco enjoys both the power of his job and its perks (which include satisfying his love of the bottle).

The rounding up of the agitators was not a scrupulous job, and an innocent youth is also among the agitators, who sympathize with him but can do nothing to help. His mother, however, is a wealthy widow and she contacts Zertouche, an affably unscrupulous man of the world who is a close contact of Carrasco. He tells the mother that it will be extremely difficult to arrange because those in political power insist on strict punishment for everyone arrested. She offers to pay 14,000 pesos. Zertouche goes to Carrasco and they have a smiling session before Zertouche returns to report that the youth can be released for a payment of 14,000 pesos.

The mother goes to her banker to arrange the sale of a summer estate that is worth that amount. The banker says it used to be worth that amount but it's now worth only 12,000 pesos, and he won't budge. The mother returns in dismay to Zertouche, who reports to Carrasco, who "generously" agrees to accept the 12,000.

Having drunk too much, Carrasco then falls asleep, waking just as the firing squad is preparing for action. It is at this point that he finally realizes who the widow is—his ex-wife—which means that the youth about to be shot is his son. He rushes out to the yard and interrupts the shooting just in time. Although the ending comes out of the blue, implausible and unnecessary, it doesn't spoil the overall strength of the film.

⁂

The camera owner in *Smash His Camera* is Ron Gallela, a freelancer whose ability to photograph famous people by surprise irritated many and drove a few to violence. Now approaching eighty, he is still active but no longer so provocative. His longest but always nonviolent clash was with Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, whom he greatly admired, but she objected to his lying in wait for her and her young children. Eventually she took Gallela to court and he was barred from coming closer to them than fifty yards. Sometime later he happened to come upon her alone on a quiet street. He took one more picture of her and she made no official complaint.

I expected the film's busy music score to annoy me, but it didn't. With the emphasis here primarily on the visual, often changing rapidly from one situation to another, the mobility of the music kept up an impression of inexhaustibility in Gallela's career.

⁂

It's not often that I feel like calling a documentary suspenseful, astonishing, and exhilarating, especially when it focuses not on any kind of sport but on a creative contest that demands patience, delicacy, infinite care, and a detailed range of specialized knowledge. The contest shown in *Kings of Pastry*, which takes place every four years, is named Les Meilleurs Ouvriers de France (The Best Craftsmen in France), but only one craft is involved—that of pastry cook. (So far only men are allowed to compete, though they may have knowledgeable aides of either sex.)

A friend of co-director Chris Hegedus knew a chef in Chicago, Jacquy Pfeiffer, who planned to compete in the contest—and that led to the making of this film. Pfeiffer began his preparation at the French Pastry School in Chicago and then moved to France, practicing for ten weeks with friends who would make up his team. (They'd be allowed to offer advice but not to give any constructive help.)

Each entrant is required to create just one overall example of his skill in patisserie. The theme for this year was marriage. Pfeiffer's creation goes through many stages, including a large transparent blown-sugar container that looks as if made of glass, accompanied by dozens of smaller fruit-like creations. There is much trial and error along with hints of confusion and desperation all around.

Running behind this most French of events is a series of rules, situations, and paradoxes that reminded me of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Just as Alice often finds herself treated by the animals not as an important human being but as an inept inferior, the experienced contestants of

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1, pps 10–11, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.1.10

Portrait of the artist
Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child. An Arthouse Films release, 2010.

Pfeiffer and his team find themselves struggling to assert their confidence.

The contest lasts three consecutive days, of which the third, with the final judging, begins at 4 a.m. Now there are groups of judges sitting side by side as they chew away at the entries, some less visibly pleased than others. Eventually someone announces five names—those of the entrants who have passed the test.

⁂

It's hard to think of any artist who rose to fame and later sank to death as quickly as Jean-Michel Basquiat. Even the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, who won lasting fame in his teens but quit writing by age twenty, lived on as a wanderer and smuggler for another seventeen years. Tamra Davis's *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child* aims to trace the rise and fall of Basquiat not only with today's visual and aural resources but also with the comments and memories of many who knew or worked with him. In this it differs sharply from the approach of Julian Schnabel in his 1992 film, in which actors play Basquiat and his entourage.

Basquiat's father was from Haiti, his mother was born in New York of Puerto Rican parents, and Basquiat himself was a native-born New Yorker. After quitting school before his senior year Basquiat became involved with other young people interested in art, and over the following years he developed his inexhaustibly varied system of black cartoon-like figures splashed with color and threaded with black-painted comments. He worked with speed and confidence. Some of Davis's own footage dates from those years, but it's a pity that the many archival shots she adds were filmed too narrowly to show the full extent of Basquiat's creations. Davis does her best to compensate for that drawback by adding her own footage of a large number of people who knew Basquiat in various ways. This works well when the person is a close friend and collaborator such as the late Andy Warhol, but it can become tedious and dissonant with most of the critics, dealers, and other outsiders who appear (some more than once), conflicting with Davis's aim of showing the positive side of Basquiat's life and achievement.

Near the beginning of the film there is a magical shot of Basquiat at a party, his head leaning backward as if supported by those around him, his face and hair glowing with golden light as he smiles and gently speaks.

Just before the end of the film there is a shot of Basquiat alone behind a curved brick parapet looking out into a gray distance. He is silent, blank-faced, and motionless.

The ending is short and bitter. Warhol has suddenly died, tearing away a close friend and collaborator. Basquiat has become an increasingly lonely heroin addict. And then he too dies.

WILLIAM JOHNSON is a former New York Editor of *Film Quarterly.*

AT THE EDGE OF HISTORY

***Post Mortem* (Pablo Larrain)**
***Meek's Cutoff* (Kelly Reichardt)**

Two period pictures at the New York Film Festival (September 24–October 10) investigate history from an oblique viewpoint. Pablo Larrain's *Post Mortem* replays 1973's bloody coup against Marxist president of Chile Salvador Allende from the perspective of an autopsy clerk; Kelly Reichardt's *Meek's Cutoff*, set in 1845, tracks a wandering wagon team on the Oregon Trail at a time when that territory's ownership was yet to be established. In both features, huge events or processes (the overturning of a government in South America, the establishment of a new order in North America) take place offscreen, invisible to characters and spectators alike.

Post Mortem begins with a black screen and a deafening noise. The source proves to be a tank seen only from beneath its undercarriage as it rolls over a street strewn with detritus. Cut to blank-faced, lank-haired Mario (Alfredo Castro, the John Travolta impersonator from Larrain's earlier *Tony Manero*) gazing stolidly, steadily from a window. Mario, it seems, likes to look. We follow him to a louche burlesque club where he spies on the dancers from the wings and infiltrates the dressing room where his neighbor, showgirl Nancy (Antonia Zegers), has just been fired for being too thin. Taking her home in his car (his bad hair rhymes with her bad wig), they are suddenly surrounded by demonstrating students. Nancy is pulled out by a handsome shaggy radical, leaving Mario marooned amid the surging crowd, with history literally passing him by.

Post Mortem seems at points to mock the political passions of its age: mild-mannered white-coated technicians at Mario's mortuary chant revolutionary slogans and announce the imminent arrival of the New (Communist) Man. With its buzzing fluorescents and echoing floors, the facility seems an unlikely stage for such fervor. Apparently affect-less, Mario is ever marginal. Stalking the anorexic Nancy, he hovers at the edge of smoke-filled rooms where radicals argue; and when the two first spend time together, both weep uncontrollably (and inexplicably) over the fried eggs Mario has so carefully prepared. Typically the food is kept out of frame, with Larrain focusing mercilessly on his characters' faces. When we suddenly cut to the odd couple having sex the framing is equally eccentric: we see half her face and breast as Mario howls once more, as he had when he wept at the table.

Larrain also uses sound design to trace the boundaries of history. The tentative affair is cut brutally short by a coup that is shown only in its absence. As Mario showers we hear offscreen what he cannot: the smashing of glass that signals the destruction of his neighbor's house. Fighter planes, unseen once more, thunder overhead. When Mario ventures out, the city is suddenly silent, reduced to smoking ruins. Soon naked bodies pile up at the morgue. But Mario is more focused on attending to an injured dog, rescued from the home of his now missing girlfriend.

Larrain's most daring commentary on history is yet to come. Mario and his colleagues, wearing incongruous hard hats over their lab coats, are taken to the scene of a special autopsy. Minute description of a brutalized body precedes the revelation that this is Allende himself, the victim of murder or suicide. But *Post Mortem* focuses here not on the dead president but on Mario. Offered an unfamiliar electric typewriter, he proves comically incapable of recording the most important autopsy in the history of his nation. And the resolution of the personal narrative proves to be as offbeat as this political story. Mario will be reunited with his obsession, the faithless Nancy, but his revenge on her will be signaled by a lengthy close up of an egg, left frying in the pan to a charred black.

In a Skype-enabled Q&A at the press screening, Larrain (who was born in 1976) acknowledged that the period in which his film is set is for him a "mystery" and that he sought rather to recreate a mood, a "quiet, strange feeling." And as a filmmaker he makes no judgment on those he depicts, characters who are indifferent to politics yet finally affected by it. Interestingly Larrain located his labor of historical reconstruction not in art design but in cinematography: spurning the digital tweaking of the modern era, *Post Mortem* uses no post-production effects and is shot with anamorphic lenses made in the late Soviet period.

Meek's Cutoff starts with similar obliqueness. In the first shot oxen pull a wagon across a racing river. Women wade, breast high in the water, holding a birdcage and a basket on their heads. Just as their bodies are swathed in sodden fabric, so their faces are hidden by stubborn bonnets. As free from dialogue as *Post Mortem*, *Meek's Cutoff* attentively follows the wordless labor of settler life: the loading of precious water and the washing of dirty dishes, the feeding of a fragile canary in that incongruous cage. A man then carves a single word on dry driftwood: "Lost."

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1, pps 12–13, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.1.12

A marginal viewpoint
Meek's Cutoff. © 2010 Thunderegg LLC. Courtesy of New York Film Festival.

Like Larrain's clerk, then, Reichardt's travelers seem all at sea from the very start, adrift in a historical process that continues, unperceived, all around them. And as in the Biblical narrative of Adam's expulsion from Paradise, which they read aloud by the campfire, these pious migrants (led by an impressively stoic Michelle Williams) seem to be already in exile even as they light out for a territory that is described by their charismatic guide Meek (a wild-bearded Bruce Greenwood) as a "regular second Eden."

But while *Post Mortem* is contained within a claustrophobic city (stricken streets, shattered homes), *Meek's Cutoff* is set in an expansive, ecstatic landscape that seems to mock those who blunder so determinedly across it. Handsome horizontal compositions strip wide sky above bleak desert and merciless alkaline lakes; too bright stars pierce night skies seething with dark clouds. Reichardt (director of *Old Joy*, an earlier inconclusive trek into nature) has a gift for the telling detail that is as handsome as it is ominous: a lost cotton handkerchief blown by the wind over a cracked, baked river bed, pursued by a bonneted lady who might seem more at home in a drawing room than in this wilderness.

The American sublime of landscape thus frames and almost forecloses the horrors of history. As the women rise before dawn to build the fires, they casually use a racial epithet to complain about how hard they work; Meek breezily recounts his role in a massacre of Indians at a lake, a day spent "duckin' and divin' and shootin'." And when conflict is introduced it is, as in *Post Mortem*, at the margins of the frame. The camera follows the embroidered hem of a lady's dress through the brush until it stumbles upon the legs of a (previously unseen) Native American.

History is here very much in the balance. The characters repeatedly ask themselves if the territory will "go" American, Indian, or English. Lost in time, they (and we) are equally disorientated in space. Meek claims that the mountains they are traveling through have no name. Yet the Indian they capture reads and writes pictographs on the rocks and addresses the landscape at length (praying or pleading?) in a native language that goes untranslated. As the wagon team lose hope (starched cuffs are stained black with dust, husbands succumb to fever), they are stuck in a period and place that are illegible to them and salutarily strange to us. While *Post Mortem*'s ending is brutally closed, the conclusion of *Meek's Cutoff* is defiantly inconclusive. But what both of these remarkable films reveal is that when a familiar history is viewed from the margins (from a place of insistent, and resonant, incomprehension) we see it, with a shock, as if for the first time.

PAUL JULIAN SMITH is Distinguished Professor in the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures Program at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

IN MEMORIAM: THE FRENCH HITCHCOCK

I

This column originally began as a musing on the new Blu-ray edition of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), which let me see previously invisible lines, pores, makeup on the actors' faces: the ageless film looked old at last. But I was thrown off my subject by the death of Claude Chabrol—or rather, by a certain (to me) striking detail in his necrology. The man known as the French Hitchcock had died at the age of eighty . . . just like Hitchcock. It was madness to be unnerved by this minor tabloidesque coincidence, but—we all go a little mad sometimes—it got under my skin. In my private ranking system, Chabrol had occupied the place of Favorite Working Filmmaker for a full thirty years. And now, as one after another obituary obliged me to read the words "the French Hitchcock" (often even in French!) I felt a frisson of horror—as if I were learning, along with the news of Chabrol's death, that he had died from a misnomer. My intervals of rationality did nothing to abate this horror; they merely replaced a superstitious belief that his epithet had murdered him with the positive knowledge that, as an epitaph now, it was robbing his grave.

It cheats him of his due distinction in two opposite ways. First, by suggesting that "Chabrol" is just French for "Hitchcock," it virtually guarantees incomprehension and disappointment: the spectator who comes to a Chabrol expecting a Hitchcock is sure to find it peculiarly off the mark, and will be that much less likely to identify this "off" quality as a deliberate, defining feature of its style. And second, by commonsensically implying that Hitchcock is *not* French, it dissembles an important historical fact: the Hitchcock whom we recognize and revere as cinema's supreme artist was born not in late-Victorian London but in mid-twentieth-century Paris, midwifed by the eager young critics at *Cahiers du cinéma*. It was in 1957, for instance, that two of them, Chabrol and Eric Rohmer, published the world's first book-length study of Hitchcock. Its claim that he was a major artist and the American period his major phase, its recognition of the fatal encounter and the psychic transference as central fantasies, its injunction that "it is in form that we must look for the depth of the work"—all this became and remains the basic operating equipment for thinking about Hitchcock. Long before anyone dreamed of calling him the French Hitchcock,

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 14–18 ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.14

Hitchcock's stand-in
Topaz. © 1969 Universal Studios. DVD: Universal Studios.

Chabrol was one of those chiefly responsible for making Hitchcock French.

Yet what disturbed me more deeply than the falsity of Chabrol's journalistic tag was my old uncomfortable sense of its truth—a sense so sharply revived on his death that it caused me to feel that Hitchcock himself had died a second time. For during the same thirty years (as it happens, the period that had elapsed since Hitchcock's death in 1980), I was as firmly persuaded that Chabrol was the Other Hitchcock as if I believed in metempsychosis. And if that *were* my mystic doctrine, it would have found validation in certain curious coincidences (as a Poe narrator might say) that took place in 1969. It was then that Hitchcock, not wishing to return to Paris to location-shoot a new ending for *Topaz*, entrusted the filming of the last shot to . . . Chabrol, whom he only slightly knew. The same year saw both the U.S. release of *Topaz* itself, a disaster that loudly heralded Hitchcock's artistic decline, and the French premiere of *La Femme infidèle* (*The Unfaithful Wife*), the first film in the great pentalogy of thrillers (the "Hélène cycle") that got Chabrol known as Hitchcock's French double.

Perhaps the hand-off was but a convenient working arrangement and perhaps such generational shifts in directors' reputations are common, even inevitable occurrences. And yet it all suggested to me something stranger—something like one of those weird interpsychic intimacies that Chabrol had identified in Hitchcock's films and was already wildly reproducing in his own. Was it truly just chance that Hitchcock's well seemed to be running dry just as Chabrol's showed early signs of overflowing? Just chance that when Hitchcock no longer seemed artistically viable Chabrol began being called by his name? Just chance that *La Femme infidèle* consolidated

Chabrol's style around its peculiar way of citing Hitchcock's? "Of course it was all just chance!" you will rightly retort. But that is only to say, with the hero of Chabrol's *This Man Must Die* (also 1969), that "chance is fantastic—and it exists."

No doubt, it is not simply random accident that defines the relationship between Hitchcock's films and Chabrol's—that enables the profuse textual transmigration that, once seen, is unmistakable. But nor can this process be satisfactorily explained as a deliberate project of imitation or homage. After all, he is not the Other Hitchcock who sets out to be. If there was any merit to Gus Van Sant's 1998 *Psycho* remake, with its perfidious fidelity to the original's shot structure, it consisted only in confirming the strength of Hitchcock's resistance to replication, a resistance so ferocious that it turned arguably the most frightening movie ever made into unquestionably *the* most boring remake. Of all those innumerable films since 1960 claiming to be "Hitchcockian," how many are like Hitchcock's? Or—a better question, to which the answer is nonetheless the same—how many are at all interestingly *unlike* them? Chabrol alone induced Hitchcock's stubbornly immovable spirit to pass into a different body of work. He did this, I think, by perfecting an extreme sensitivity to Hitchcock that—precisely as a *mere* sensitivity, a "thin skin" and nothing more—never acquired the consistency of an emotional attitude or an intellectual program. In contrast to the ephebic devotion of De Palma, this extraordinary responsiveness had nothing intentionally *faithful* about it, but neither by the same token could it embrace the pointed infidelity of, say, Antonioni's revisionism. It was ubiquitous but unsystematic; and if the first thing prevented Chabrol from ever *not* being faithful to Hitchcock, the second—for what would Hitchcock be without system?—meant that he could never not be *un*faithful.

II

When I attempt to inventory the Hitchcock references in *La Femme infidèle*, I am staggered less by their quantity, though it is remarkably high, than by their disparateness. I find now an object, now a gesture, here a situation or mood, there a shot or framing; one minute I am watching *The Lodger* (1927), and the next minute *Suspicion* (1941). I am reminded of the game of Hidden Pictures in which we find the horseshoe, the comb, and the banana, but these never add up to a picture of their own and perhaps even spoil the picture in which they have been discovered. Except that Chabrol never makes a serious attempt to conceal Hitchcock's pictures in his own. His citations may be sometimes subtle, but they are more often indiscreet to the point of crudeness. When the lighter from *Strangers on a Train* (1951) turns up in *La Femme infidèle*, it has been ridiculously supersized, the better to be identified. Often even bragging about how much Hitchcock miscellanea he had packed into a film, Chabrol is remarkably free of any "anxiety of influence" in relation to his great precursor. He lets the Right One in without disguise or disavowal, an influence to flow whither it will. But it would be a mistake to regard such apparent defenselessness as the artistic suicide of a director so weak that he does nothing but the Master's bidding. Too unruly to be slavish imitation, Chabrol's Hitchcockianism involves something more like wild abandon. The overproduction of citations is, of course, one sign of this wildness; but another is their underutilization. Clamorous but inarticulate, obvious but obtuse, they forego that *momentousness* conveyed by directors who keep their Hitchcock allusions under firmer thematic discipline. Think of how consistently De Palma's *Obsession* (1976) sustains its parallel with *Vertigo* (1958), which it follows as obviously, and with as much fascination, as Scottie follows Madeleine; or how precisely Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) targets a moment in *Rear Window* (1954)—when Jeff compares

Supersized

Top: *Strangers on a Train*. © 1951 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. DVD: Warner Home Video. Bottom: *La Femme infidèle* (1969). Production companies: Les Films La Boétie (Paris), Cinegaï (Rome). DVD: Pathfinder Home Entertainment.

two photographs of the flower garden and sees what his eye did not—as its object of epistemological reflection. Chabrol's proliferent but less focused citations never stand out importantly as an index of the director's intertextual intelligence; they do little but perform his crazed suggestibility to Hitchcock's power of suggestion. No wonder *La Femme infidèle* is thrilling: there is perhaps no scarier dimension to intimacy than this excitable state of porousness.

III

A bourgeois wife (Hélène) has taken a lover (Victor); her husband (Charles) discovers this and kills him; though he tries to cover up the crime, he is caught by the police. Stripped to its bare bones, the plot of *La Femme infidèle* is almost the same as that of *Dial M for Murder* (1954)—and would be exactly the same had Tony attempted to kill Mark instead of Margot as he originally thought of doing. But one need hardly insist on this hazy point; the film exemplifies its fantastic intimacy with Hitchcock in other, indisputable, and more concrete ways.

Charles, posing as a man of the world who knows and accepts Hélène's affairs, has been paying Victor a visit; but his affable pose eventually breaks down. "You look terrible," Victor remarks; and we see Charles facing a mirror. He is not quite looking at himself—his head is bowed and his eyes are lowered—but a certain tenseness of the ocular muscles suggests that there is something he is determined not to look at but can't help seeing in his mind's eye. He answers Victor, "I know." And suddenly, as if maddened by what his downcast eyes have somehow absorbed, he seizes a statuette on a side table and clobbers Victor with it. We are given only a second to see Victor keeling over before we return to Charles, himself tottering, in front of the mirror again. But now he is facing the camera rather than the mirror, and we have a chance to observe something that the earlier framing had excluded: a matched pair of pictures flanking the mirror—little pictures, pictures of birds. The tininess of these images is no obstacle to those of us whose eyes the lighter has sensitized to Chabrolian rescaling; they are miniatures of the bird pictures hanging outside Marion's bathroom in the Bates Motel.

And lo! Charles begins to clean up the scene of his unplanned crime: he wipes the bloody floor tiles, wraps the corpse neatly in sheets, lugs it to his car. He drives to a swamp, where he watches as the body sinks in the slime; its descent is arrested for a nerve-wracking moment, but at last resumed to completion. Perhaps only initiates will notice that the shot of Charles washing his bloody hands in the sink exactly mirrors the shot of Norman doing the same thing. But everyone will see that, for over twelve minutes, *La Femme infidèle* has become *Psycho*. It is as if the bird pictures were a tiny leak that had burst into massive flooding.

For many critics in 1969, the reference seriously flawed a gem; too long, too literal, and too obvious, it seemed a kind of homage gone mad, and Chabrol, in paying it, a French Hitchcock in the most epigonal sense. But the complaint ignores the genuine weirdness of the reference, mad to be sure, but also crucial to understanding Chabrol's process all through the film. For if everyone recognizes the extended *Psycho* moment, will anyone easily be able to state the point of it here? We know what Norman was doing in the scene from *Psycho*; it is much less clear what the scene from *Psycho* is doing in *La Femme infidèle*. The scene has become enigmatic in the transfer, where it plays out less as a glib reference *to* Hitchcock than as a unsettling appearance *by* him, one of those weird cameos that always feel like otherworldly visitations. Even when this Appearance begins, it is too compelling in its qualities as cinema to be the inert plagiarism it was accused of being; if you could imagine someone who didn't recognize it, the sequence would not seem badly done in itself or stylistically out of place. As with Hitchcock's own cameos, it is only if you notice it that the Appearance seems not to belong.

And as the Appearance persists, it becomes still clearer that Hitchcock is not being faithfully copied so much as crazily mirrored. The drive to the swamp, only implied in *Psycho*, is now realized in a bravura sequence of beautifully fluent cuts and amplified by a traffic accident that befalls Charles en route. How much time will he lose in the formalities? Will the police open his damaged trunk? But for the fact it isn't *in* Hitchcock, all this would be classic Hitchcock suspense. Charles's digressive drive looks not so much like an original invention as a set of free variations on the source material. The drive itself obviously picks up Marion's from Phoenix, and the accident more finely extrapolates the swerving car whose headlights momentarily shine on Norman as he is leaving the motel room. Even the gratuitous cuts seem possibly left over from the shower scene, as though, not having been used during Victor's murder, they had to be used somewhere else. These variations are of necessity as tentative and tendril-like as the fantastic attachment I am trying to describe. It is in making itself so minutely pervious to *Psycho*'s influence that *La Femme infidèle* becomes its alternative reality, the Other *Psycho*.

This Other *Psycho* finds its most outrageous manifestation near the end of the Appearance. For Charles may not follow Norman to the point of throwing out the car with the corpse: the disappearance of the family Mercedes would be

Crazy mirror

Top left: *I Confess*. © 1953 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. DVD: Warner Home Video. Left column, others: *Psycho*. © 1960 Shamley Productions Inc. DVD: Universal Studios.
Top right: *This Man Must Die* (1969). Production companies: Les Films La Boétie (Paris), Rizzoli Film (Rome).
Right column, others: *La Femme infidèle*. Production companies: Les Films La Boétie (Paris), Cinegaï (Rome). DVD: Pathfinder Home Entertainment.

suspicious. Instead, he must remove the corpse and throw *it* into the swamp. But the bundle that he takes from the trunk is not quite the same one that he stowed there; it now appears chained to an enormous boulder that presumably will cause it to sink. But the corpse was put in an empty trunk that has never been opened until now. No narrative account can make sense of its mysterious boulder-and-chain. Yet far from being a continuity error—or even *as* one—this is the film's assertion of just how far its elaboration of Hitchcock can go. For in this air thick with transference, the bloodied boulder-and-chain is only there to cross-mirror the muddied car-and-pulley at the end of *Psycho*; as that pairing worked to exhume a body, this one will proceed to bury one. Chabrol seems unable to keep himself from laying on these "touched" touches, as though his susceptibility to Hitchcock accompanied him as constantly as—in the figure the film fantastically literalizes here—a ball-and-chain.

IV

If only by accident of initials, Chabrol's porousness to Hitchcock conjures up Charles's porousness to Hélène. Though most readings maintain just the opposite, throughout the film this *bon bourgeois* has possessed an exorbitant receptivity to the vibrations of his unfaithful-faithful wife. On next to no evidence, he intuits her infidelity from the beginning; on none at all, he senses her complicity in his crime at the end. "I love you," he tells her in the garden when the police come to take him away; and her reply matches his in intentness: "I love you." No bullied "so do I" here! The couple share not just love but even the identical formula for declaring it; though consecutive and with a beat in between, their two "I love you"s have the effect of being spoken simultaneously. But then, wild as always, Charles's receptivity betrays him into adding: "I love you like crazy." To this Hélène has no response and drops his hand. He loves her more than she knows what to do with; at such a moment she, not he, seems conventional.

In the memorable final shot that follows, this scene of intimacy is replayed as sheer camera movement. Charles has joined the detectives who have been standing off at a distance, and we see Hélène from his point of view. Our remoteness from her slowly increases, suggesting that Charles is moving further away. (Unless he is walking backwards, though, Hélène is being seen by the Hitchcockian eyes in the back of his head.) Then, while the camera continues tracking back, it also begins to zoom in. As is well known, Chabrol set up this dolly zoom without determining which would end first, the dolly or the zoom: "if the zoom ended before the dolly, the despair of the separation would win out over the rapprochement; and if vice versa, he would remain close to her." As chance would have it, the tracking lasted a little bit longer than the zoom, and so, according to Chabrol, "the film ends badly." But in the light of his emphasis on being "close" to Hélène, which movement finishes first is perhaps less decisive than what the camera stops on: an image of Hélène through a grid of foliage, as if we were seeing her through pinholes. The image, far from signaling the annihilation of Charles's fantastic rapport, is the very emblem of its permeable condition. No amount of distance will disable his crazy responsiveness to Hélène; to the very end, she is seeping into him.

It is of course the famous "*Vertigo* shot" that has inspired this dolly zoom. How Chabrol must have loved that shot—how he must have loved it like crazy! For while Hitchcock's famous push-pull takes only a couple of seconds in *Vertigo* (and hardly longer in *Marnie* [1964]), this reiteration last a whole minute. Its length would dilate it beyond recognition if Chabrol ever played his Hitchcock game on only one board, but he never does: the dilation is *another* Hitchcock reference, this time to those long tracking shots that stretch out suspense until it breaks in discovery or revelation. Here, though, the suspense—like the love it depicts—is never broken or resolved. In thus expressing Charles's persistent intimacy with Hélène, the dolly zoom enacts *La Femme infidèle*'s other intimacy as well. The shot is a kind of paroxysm of that intimacy's combination of fidelity and free association, repetition and divagation. Small chance that chance alone produced the matching initials: a spectral Hitchcock hovers where the inscrutable Hélène stands and Chabrol's camera holds the place of Charles's steady but unhinged gaze.

Under the spell of this hypnotically long goodbye, wishing the film could continue beyond it, I find myself imagining a final reverse shot where Chabrol's camera returns to Charles. I can hardly say why, but suddenly I see Scottie standing at the edge of the bell tower looking down to Judy, who lies dead below. And I hear once again his wild outburst when he confuses her with her predecessor: "Oh Madeleine, I loved you so!"

D. A. MILLER is John F. Hotchkis Professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley.

DVD DATA *Psycho* [fiftieth-anniversary Blu-ray edition]. Director: Alfred Hitchcock, 1960. © Shamley Productions Inc. Publisher: Universal. $26.98, 1 disc.

The Unfaithful Wife [*La Femme infidèle*]. Director: Claude Chabrol, 1969. Production companies: Les Films La Boétie (Paris), Cinegaï (Rome). Publisher: Pathfinder Home Entertainment [2003]. $19.98, 1 disc.

OSHIMA REVISITED

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH ADMIRES THE COMPLEX SKEPTICISM OF A GREAT JAPANESE DIRECTOR

In fall 2009, the National Film Theatre in London put on a retrospective of the work of Nagisa Oshima, previously shown at the Ontario Cinematheque in Toronto in 2008 and then at a number of other North American venues. It was an extraordinary season, which had taken Ontario's programmer, James Quandt, nearly ten years to put together. It was not only the little-known films that were a problem but some well-known ones as well which, after a glory moment at the time of international release, had disappeared into the rights-and-prints limbo with which programmers, archivists, and independent film and video distributors are all too familiar. All in all, it was an occasion not to be missed and—I am sad to say—too many people missed it. Although the show had drawn good audiences in Toronto, in London attendance was disappointing. Many of the screenings I went to were only half full and there was rarely any of the buzz one experiences on leaving the theater after a film that has really grabbed the audience. Why was it, I wondered, that films which had so excited audiences in the late 1960s and early 70s no longer seemed to have any drawing power forty or so years later? Was Oshima just a flash in the pan, a 1960s phenomenon whose work could not resonate outside the heady atmosphere that had existed on either side of 1968?

Support for the idea that he was just that came from the patchy quality of the program notes. Except for a few contemporary reviews (notably those by Tom Milne in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*), there seemed to be little of critical interest written about any Oshima film for the compilers to lay their hands on. And this not for want of trying, since the compilers are famous for finding interesting materials, even in the most unlikely places. My own search was equally fruitless. It really seemed to be the case that, apart from the huffing and puffing about censorship and *In the Realm of the Senses*, Oshima had dropped out of sight in the mid-1970s and never properly come back. For a while some of his films remained available on 16mm, but when 16mm distribution collapsed in the late 1980s they did not reappear on video. 35mm prints of some of his earlier films continued to circulate in France, where they also began to be released on DVD. But the Oshima films now belatedly appearing in the DVD catalogs in France and North America (notably a most welcome Criterion boxed set, *Oshima's Outlaw Sixties*) are most of them either earlier or later than those that created such a stir forty years ago.

My own responses, too, were curious. The more I saw the more convinced I became that Oshima is a truly great filmmaker, and the less likable I found the films. By the time the season ended I came to the conclusion that his greatness was inseparable from his indifference to whether his films were likable or not. It's not that he sets out to displease, as if there was some moral virtue in giving offense (Dogme etc., please note). But even in the films whose underlying situation is basically comical, such as *Three Resurrected Drunkards* (1968), and even in the delightful and mainly lighthearted *Dear Summer Sister* (1972), there is no evidence of a desire to please at the expense of what the filmmaker regards as the necessity of the story he has embarked on. I won't say at the expense of the truth, because truth in Oshima films is always hypothetical rather than absolute. It is just that once the hypothesis is formulated its consequences are pursued with a rigor that makes few concessions to ordinary audience expectations. If the film presents no character who can possibly function as a focus of emotional engagement, then so be it. But the story told will be no less compelling, whether it has the inexorability of classical tragedy, as in *The Ceremony* (1971), or if it is in appearance arbitrary and whimsical (although brutal at the same time) as in *A Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Song* (1967).

Oshima's filmmaking career falls into three distinct phases and in none of them has he been a crowd-pleaser. Between 1959 and 1962, and more or less unknown outside Japan, he made a series of offbeat crime films, first for the

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 19–23 ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.19

Learning nothing
Sing a Song of Sex [*A Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Song*]. © 1967 Shochiku Co. Ltd. Courtesy of The Criterion Collection.

Shochiku studio and then independently. The most remarkable of his films of that period, however, was not a crime film at all but his third film for Shochiku, the extremely avant-garde and highly political *Night and Fog in Japan* (1960). So inflammatory was it thought to be that Shochiku pulled it from release. In retaliation, Oshima left the studio and had to make shift for himself. His choice of the crime genre was therefore partly economic—crime films were popular in Japan at the time and could be made on a low budget—but it also reflected his growing conviction that the minority of people who committed crimes were a more interesting guide to a society's malaise than the majority who did not.

In the mid-1960s he worked mainly for television. He visited Korea, then recovering from the effects of war (and Japanese occupation before it), and Vietnam, recovering from one war but now being afflicted by another, more devastating one. His second phase as a feature filmmaker can be dated from 1967 and the extraordinary *Nihon shunka-ko*—a title which translates literally as *A Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Song* but was rendered on its (belated) North American release as *Sing a Song of Sex*, a jolly-sounding title for a distinctly unjolly film. Then, in a sudden burst, he made half a dozen films that were to make his international reputation: *Death by Hanging*, *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* (both 1968), *Boy* (1969), *The Man Who Left His Will on Film* (1970), *The Ceremony*, and *Dear Summer Sister*.

In both these phases Oshima made films fast, cheaply, and for (and about) Japan. If the films reached export markets too, that was a bonus. But then he was invited by French producer Anatole Dauman to make a "pornographic" film for international release. The result was *Ai no corrida*, variously known in English as *In the Realm of the Senses* and *Empire of the Senses*. Although not strictly pornography, the film was scandalously full of explicit sex and possibly Oshima's only crowd-pleasing film. It also inaugurated a third phase in his career, as a maker of international art films. Compared to the films he made before, these films were laborious to set up and slow and expensive to make, which may go some way to explaining why there have been so few of them: after *In the Realm of the Senses*, only *Empire of Passion* (1978), *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* (1983), *Max mon amour* (1986), and (in a return to filmmaking after suffering a stroke) *Taboo* (1999).

Oshima's worldwide reputation was very much shaped by the order in which his films became known in the west. The turning point came with a screening out of competition of his most Brechtian film, *Death by Hanging*, at the Cannes festival in the fateful month of May 1968. Prior to that he was more or less unknown except as a member of an equally little known Japanese "new wave." There had however been a couple of one-off screenings in London of *The Sun's Burial* (1960) and *Naked Youth* (1960—now more generally known as *Cruel Story of Youth*). The late Ian Cameron, who had been at the screenings, noted in *Movie* (winter 1969–70) that, as genre movies, these films were anomalous, since neither of them "fits into the established emotional modes of crime movies, whether optimistic or pessimistic. Virtue is certainly not triumphant—the good guys don't beat the good guys because Oshima does not work in these terms and there is no firm candidate for the position of good guy" (10). The absence of

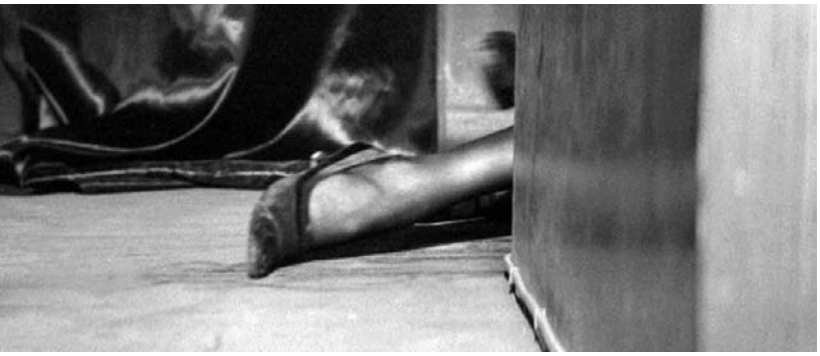
someone to root for is, as I have already intimated, a pretty constant feature of Oshima's films, but it is particularly striking in the early films since it defies an almost universal audience expectation not just in Hollywood but in genre films the world over. It is then taken to a new level in some of the more obviously unconventional films of the late 1960s. Not taking it properly into account is, I think, the source of much misunderstanding of the enduring significance of his work.

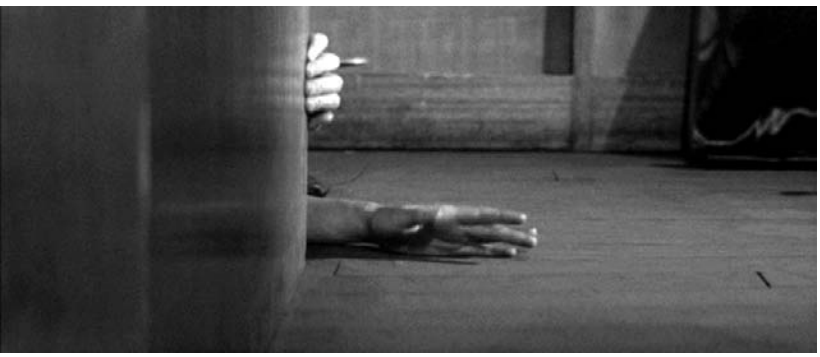
The reception of Oshima's middle-period films took place, not surprisingly, very much in the shadow of 1968—and of the exemplary radical filmmaker of the time, Jean-Luc Godard, with whom Oshima tended, misleadingly in my opinion, to be compared. So it was also not surprising that Oshima was asked in 1968 what he had in common with Godard. To this he is said to have replied: "Two things: cinema and politics." This cryptic remark could be taken to mean that, like Godard, he was a filmmaker who "made films politically." Almost certainly, though, he meant a great deal less. He meant: we both make films and we are both on the left in politics. Beyond that, however, there is only difference. For Godard in the relevant period—roughly from *La Chinoise* in 1967 to *Tout va bien* in 1972—political films meant films which pursued a political line, with some questioning but with a line none the less. For Oshima, too, politics meant having a line, but filmmaking was something else. Very few of his films have a message, but one that does is *The Man Who Left His Will on Film* from 1970, and the message there is that making films and doing politics are different and indeed antithetical things. As for doing politics, neither the "old" nor the "new" left is shown as doing it particularly well. This too is a recurrent theme. Probably the most heavily criticized characters in any of Oshima's films are the Communist Party politicos and student activists in *Night and Fog in Japan* whose actions are dictated by what they take to be the correct political line to adopt. Just as it is hard to find a straightforwardly sympathetic character in any Oshima film, so it is hard to find the expression of a "correct" point of view on politics or anything else. The characters flounder, they are stuck with attitudes and behaviors whose rationale is obscure to themselves and often to the audience as well. There is never a voice of truth in an Oshima film. Some characters may strive harder than others to understand the truth about themselves or their situation but the film as a whole never puts forward their point of view as overriding truth. This is in sharp contrast to the "political" Godard, who is always telling the audience what to think, either in an intrusive voiceover or through a character speaking on his behalf.

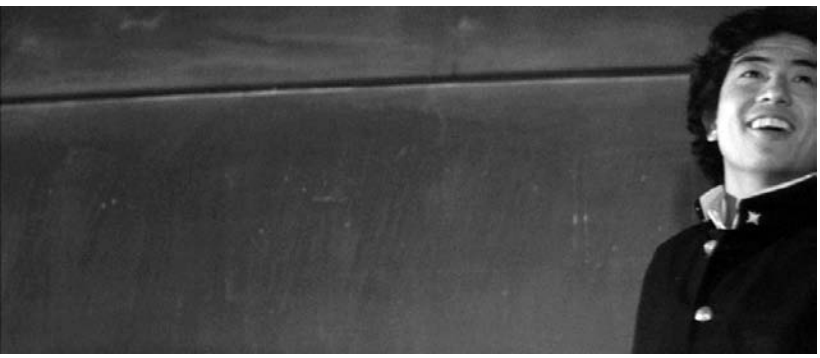
As if that were not enough, Oshima also frequently blurs the boundaries between fantasy and reality, making truth an even more elusive quality than it usually is in the cinema. (Arguably this blurring of the boundaries is simply a reflection of the way things happen in real life and the role of fantasy within it.) It is no accident that his only film with a non-Japanese setting, *Max mon amour*, was written by Jean-Claude Carrière, Buñuel's principal scriptwriter from the mid-1960s onward. In Oshima's case, this is yet another factor that makes his films hard to grasp—though all the more worth getting hold of when one succeeds in doing so.

Most important, however, is the content. "Above all," Oshima said, at the time of the film's release, "I hope that people will talk about the *content* of *Death by Hanging*" (Stephen Heath, "Anata mo," *Screen*, winter 1976–77, 56, quoting an unspecified interview with Oshima). The content of that particular film is (or is to do with) three things: punishment (specifically, the death penalty as judicial murder), the "Korean question," and rape. Of these three, both the Korean question and rape are recurrent in Oshima's films, the latter from the beginning of his career, the former from *Yunbogi's Diary*, made in 1965 after his extended visit to Korea the previous year, onward. The two are connected not merely superficially (the Korean R. is sentenced to death for rape and murder in *Death by Hanging*; a Korean girl is raped in *A Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Song*) but profoundly. Arguably they together constitute two major aspects of what for Oshima is the "Japan question": on the one side Japan's unexorcised imperial and militarist past, and on the other its perverse sexual culture, and the connection between them.

How tightly Oshima makes this connection only became clear to me when I watched a number of Oshima's middle-period films more or less in sequence during the retrospective, beginning with *A Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Song*. As the title implies, it is a film in which bawdy songs play an important role. But not only bawdy songs. There are also some squeaky-clean American protest songs, and soldiers' songs from the time of the invasion of Manchuria in the 1930s. It is the last named that are most significantly recurrent in Oshima's films up to *The Ceremony* and *Dear Summer Sister*. They tend to be sung by old men in bars and are often responded to by other characters singing songs of their own, either expressing political dissent or (as in *A Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Song*) a cynical indifference to the old men and their memories. If, like me, you don't speak Japanese, you have to pay close attention to the subtitles to notice what is going on. In *A Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Song* a left-wing professor teaches some students a rather unattractive dirty ditty. At first it is used as a counter to the militarists in the background—speciously justified by the claim that bawdy songs are the unconscious voice of the oppressed who are yet to become aware of their oppression. But later in the film, when the male students persist in singing the







The Japan question

Sing a Song of Sex. © 1967 Shochiku Co. Ltd. DVD: Criterion Eclipse.

song, a woman student responds with her own song. She calls it a "women's song" but more significantly it is a love song sung by a prostitute in Japanese-occupied Manchuria, in which she asks a soldier to pay a small amount extra and stay all night—to be a lover, in other words, not just a client. The prostitute is presumably a Korean "comfort woman" shipped abroad for the benefit of Japanese troops, but this is not explicitly stated and a western viewer would be unaware of the fact unless prompted by a helpful program note. Nor would that viewer necessarily be aware that the girl student singing it is herself Korean.

The film contains a number of scenes of actual or fantasized, real or attempted rape, including on the Korean girl, and concludes in an extraordinary and, to me, horrifying manner. The young men have decided they should apologize to a young woman they fantasized about raping during their university entrance exam. The characters assemble in the examination room for a therapeutic reenactment. But there is to be no cleansing cathartic moment. Though the reality status of what happens in this highly theatrical scene is not one hundred percent certain, what is then shown to the audience is not a fantasized rape but a murder taking place "for real," the truth of the central character lying in the fact that his murderous fantasy is more real than the civilized values he is supposed to be acquiring. He and the other young men have learnt nothing, whether about history and politics, or love and sex, and are as obtuse, in their way, as the old men who fought in Manchuria and have never forgotten it.

The Japanese critic Tadao Sato observes in *Currents in Japanese Cinema* (Kodansha, 1982) that in Oshima's early films criminality emerges out of an obscure need to express something that society prevents from being expressed, and is therefore potentially revolutionary. But, from *Violence at Noon* (1966) and *A Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Song* onward, Sato suggests, "he seems to be experimenting with the idea of a human craving for freedom that cannot be satisfied through social revolution and he almost always repeats the despairing view that if people seek freedom they can only become criminal" (177). The important word here is "experimenting." There is in Oshima, it seems to me, a vacillation between a materialist historical view that traces the root of the evils of the Japan in which he grew up back to its recent militarist past and beyond that to the forced modernization of the Meiji period, and a more deeply pessimistic view of human nature in general. In his films set in the present there are constant references to Japanese crimes in Manchuria, Korea, and (in *Dear Summer Sister*) Okinawa. In *In the Realm of the Senses*, set in the 1930s, we actually see the troops setting out for Manchuria. Finally in *Taboo*, he goes deeper into the past to denounce the samurai culture that preceded Meiji but was integrated into the supposed modernization. But there is also a sense that if a society is so corrupt as to be beyond reform and can only fantasize but cannot concretely achieve revolution, the roots lie deeper, in some human tendency to self-assertion (mostly male) and where assertion fails, submission (mostly female). The two visions are combined in *The Ceremony*, where the ruling-class family is held together by rape and incest instigated by its patriarchal head. In the end the family is destroyed. There is a faint hope held up that its destruction is timely, that the conditions that permitted its monstrous survival no longer persist, and a world can come into being in which such monstrosity will no longer prevail.

"Pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will." This phrase, borrowed by Antonio Gramsci from the French writer Romain Rolland, applies well to Oshima. Which side one responds to is a historically conditioned choice. What many of us in the 1960s and 70s chose to see was the optimistic side. We were used to films which had neither happy nor redemptive endings and which ended only in death, defeat, or disgrace. In this respect, Oshima seemed little different from Skolimowski, Makavejev, Rocha, or numerous other new filmmakers from Europe or Latin America. His Brechtianism (most notable in *Death by Hanging*) and his occasional recourse to metacinema (as in *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*) were also familiar, as was his refusal of the fake realism of pseudo-political melodramas such as Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*.[†] But his rejection of the usual processes for eliciting sympathy or empathy for his characters was more radical than we were prepared to admit. Grateful for the scraps of likability that the films offered, and confident that problems presented themselves only in order to be solved, we tended to underplay the negativity that was the essential other side of what Oshima was proposing. Not that I would suggest just flipping the coin to the negative side. For the point of Oshima's cinema is that the two sides are kept in balance. If pessimism seems to prevail, it is a hypothetical pessimism. In Oshima's world, things could be other, though too often they are not.

Whether Oshima's unique brand of skeptical pessimism will in due course return to favor I do not know. I would like it to happen, but I suspect it will not, at least not in a hurry. This may just be my own pessimism speaking. If Oshima's truth was hard to take in a context of radical hope, now may not be the time for it to return to taunt us. But it should.

[†]Though we were not to know it at the time, Oshima had fiercely attacked *Battle of Algiers* in 1967, in his essay "On the Attitude of Film Theorists"—translated in Nagisa Oshima, *Cinema, Censorship, and the State* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 133–143.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH is the author of *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s* (Continuum, 2007).

DVD DATA *Oshima's Outlaw Sixties* [*Pleasures of the Flesh* (1965), *Violence at Noon* (1966), *Sing a Song of Sex* (1967), *Japanese Summer: Double Suicide* (1967), *Three Resurrected Drunkards* (1968)]. Director: Nagisa Oshima. © 1965–68 Shochiku Co. Ltd. Publisher: Criterion Eclipse. $69.95, 5 discs.

ABSTRACT Nagisa Oshima's films of the 1960s made him a darling of left-wing cinephiles, who responded to their radicalism and embraced it as revolutionary optimism. Thirty years on, however, the films seem much more pessimistic, skeptical, and unlikable—and arguably all the greater as a consequence.

KEYWORDS Oshima, Japanese cinema, political cinema, *Sing a Song of Sex, A Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Song*

THE ART OF DISTRIBUTION: VIDEO ON DEMAND

LUCAS HILDERBRAND REPORTS ON DIGITAL INNOVATIONS IN ARTHOUSE DISTRIBUTION

That the film, home video, and television markets are in flux has become "the new normal." The DVD market has dropped off and television networks have been talking about audience drift for years. Independent cinema, in particular, seems to be in crisis, as the economics simply do not add up any more. In the post-Miramax, post-mumblecore moment, feature-length independent and art films have become almost impossible to finance in the U.S., and distributing such films for theatrical release has become a nearly outmoded business model as marketing costs can frequently outstrip box-office grosses. A number of distributors and studio specialty divisions, from New Yorker Films and Wellspring to Paramount Vantage, Warner Independent, and the once-titan Miramax, have ceased operation or been sold off. What's an independent distributor to do? (See chart 1.)

Chart 1: Independent Film Releases in the U.S.

Year	*Releases*	*Box office share*
1993	63	1.9%
2000	129	5.8%
2009	274	1.2%

Source: Donald Wilson, "Over There: The Upside to the Downside of 2009," *Film Comment* 46, no. 2 (March/April 2010): 54.

IFC Films has developed a multi-platform method for distributing art and cult cinema, one that suggests that digital delivery now sustains cinephile content. Magnolia Pictures has done something similar. These two distributors release many of the most aesthetically challenging and politically radical films today, yet the survival of such so-called independent cinema seems to depend upon multimedia ownership. Although neither distributor is part of one of the companies usually understood as constituting "big media"—Time Warner, Disney, News Corporation, Viacom, NBC Universal—the cross-ownership of content and delivery platforms nonetheless facilitates, if not drives, the availability of such difficult films as IFC Films' *Hunger* (2008) and Magnolia's *Food, Inc.* (2008). Video on Demand (VOD) has become central to both companies' new distribution strategies in ways that both capitalize upon challenging films and integrate content and delivery platforms owned by sibling companies. Although VOD has been around for a decade, it has received little scholarly attention in terms either of the independent cinema scene or of media convergence.

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 24–28, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.24

IFC FILMS AND MAGNOLIA PICTURES

A couple years ago, a friend mentioned that she watched *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007) on demand weeks before I managed to see it during a trip to San Francisco. Last winter break, I watched both *Antichrist* (2009) and *Summer Hours* (2008) streaming on Netflix—months prior to either film's DVD release. Like these films, some of my favorite titles of the past decade, from *Together* (2000) to *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005) to *Savage Grace* to *Love Songs* (both 2007), have been released through IFC Films. I have been struck that not only is IFC Films releasing some of the most acclaimed international art films—the company is now regularly described in the trade press as the most aggressive distributor for festival acquisitions—but also it seems to be breaking from established patterns for releasing films. But I have at the same time been perplexed by how the company stays in business, as few of its numerous releases would appear to gross enough to recoup costs.

IFC Films is the sibling theatrical distribution company of the Independent Film Channel, which is part of the Rainbow Media Group, which also owns the similar narrowcast network Sundance Channel, as well as AMC (American Movie Classics, now home of original programming such as *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad*), WE (Women's Entertainment), and Wedding Central. Rainbow, in turn, is owned by parent company Cablevision, one of the U.S.'s major cable service operators. IFC Films began distributing films theatrically in 2000 and had a breakthrough year in 2002 with *My Big Fat*

Love Songs
Courtesy IFC Films/Red Envelope Entertainment.

Greek Wedding ($241 million in the U.S.) and *Y Tu Mamá También* (nearly $14 million), still the company's two top-grossing films. Of its more than 180 releases, no others have crossed the $5 million threshold theatrically, and relatively few have grossed more than $1 million.

Who would have imagined that the rather unremarkable romantic comedy *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* would not only become an unforeseen blockbuster but also open up important pathways for film distribution? In 2003, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* was the first high-definition VOD feature available to cable subscribers in the U.S. through a deal brokered between HBO and InDemand (more on them below).[1] It was also the most popular rental for Netflix that year, the first year the company that has redefined video rental posted a profit.[2] The big fat success of *Greek Wedding* gave IFC the capital to develop new ventures, acquire more films, and experiment with new platforms. For example, IFC bought the Waverly Theater in downtown New York City and turned it into the multi-screen IFC Center, a flagship venue for premiering IFC Films releases and repertory programming.

More importantly, IFC Films has aggressively developed the VOD market, developing a number of brands for VOD programming and effectively shifting the connotations of "direct-to-video." IFC's venture into VOD reflects something of an integration of its corporate enterprises as both a cable network and a theatrical distributor. Initially, the company explored both subscription and pay-per-view VOD options. In 2003, IFC Films entered VOD with IFC Uncensored, a subscription-based offering of explicit or controversial films, including such classics as *I Am Curious (Yellow)* (1967). The following year IFC Films, in collaboration with MGM Home Video, offered simultaneous VOD and DVD releases for *Casa de los Babys*.[3]

In 2006, IFC Films initiated the new distribution model that has come to define the company's innovations: synchronized VOD availability with theatrical exhibition. In fact, the VOD window, typically spanning a couple of months, actually makes films available to viewers for longer than a film would last at a local theater. IFC Films debuted day-and-date releases for theatrical and VOD with à la carte pay-per-view pricing with *CSA: The Confederate States of America* under

the banner IFC First Take in 2006. IFC Films has expanded this model with more extensive lineups, offering far more VOD features than it releases in theaters. Currently, it promotes simultaneous arthouse releases as IFC in Theaters; cult and horror offerings as IFC Midnight; and films acquired at festivals that will not be released theatrically as IFC Festival Direct.

According to Arianna Bocco, Senior Vice President of Acquisitions for IFC Films, the distributor now acquires 75–100 films per year for different kinds of distribution, with between twenty-four and twenty-eight of those released theatrically. When acquiring films, the company buys rights for "all media." The costs of striking numerous film prints, shipping them across the country, and promoting a film in each market has become unsustainable for many titles and does not make financial sense in many cases. VOD has become an important distribution platform, not only for minimizing the costs of a distribution and promotion, but also for more immediate revenue-sharing. VOD digitization and delivery are not costless, but the simultaneous release does allow the company to gain two revenue streams from a single marketing campaign.[4] In contrast to the traditional platforming release patterns that grow prestige pictures by word of mouth and slowly expand from major urban markets to less cosmopolitan sites, viewers outside New York who read about a film in the national media can view the film instantly rather than wait for weeks for a local release that may never come.

Magnolia Pictures has been a peer experimenter for multi-platform releasing, and its strategies are likewise attributable in part to its own business structure. *Variety* has called Magnolia "the frontrunner of releasing pics on VOD."[5] Founded in 2001, the company has specialized in documentaries and foreign-language films, such as *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003), *Control Room* (2004), *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005), *Let the Right One In* (2008), and *I Am Love* (2009). The distributor's American independent features, however, have been important for testing the company's distribution experiments. Magnolia released Steven Soderbergh's *Bubble* (2005) simultaneously on DVD and in theaters and the director's *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009) for VOD before theatrical. It has also found, like IFC Films, that VOD has matched or even exponentially exceeded theatrical revenues for such films as *Humboldt County* (2008). With *Two Lovers* (2008), the film's VOD release was given a tiered pricing during the film's release, starting at a premium on-demand rate before theatrical release, reduced rates simultaneous with theatrical runs, and discounted second-run rates after the film left theaters. Magnolia is a subsidiary of production outfit 2929 Entertainment (owned by Todd Wagner and Mark Cuban), which also owns the Landmark Theater chain (the largest arthouse chain in the U.S.), and HDNet Movies, the cable network for simultaneous on-demand features. In other words, 2929 is involved in production, distribution, and brick-and-mortar and digital exhibition. It's a conglomerate, but one with progressive politics and an interesting eye.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF VIDEO ON DEMAND

As a platform and revenue stream, VOD emerged as a millennial strategy to navigate the convergence of film, cable, and the Internet. "Video on Demand" appeared in trade and news reports in 2000 as a prototype ancillary market and a new term, a rebranding of "pay-per-view" by analogy with renting movies from a video store.[6] In part, what has been striking about the usage of the term is its non-specificity. It has regularly been used to identify two different kinds of emerging video services: downloadable web-based video and cable television content. Because of this dual meaning, VOD as a term and concept has reflected considerable ambiguity, but an ambiguity indicative of a major industrial trend: VOD emerged as cable providers increasingly tried to promote high-speed Internet in a bundle with subscription TV, according to the logic that it was all a matter of digital delivery. VOD was thus part of the much-trumpeted arrival of "interactive TV" in the early 2000s, which promised enhanced TV, broadcast–website synergy, and viewer participation.[7] As these technologies have shifted and developed, their meanings have stabilized and become differentiated to an extent. VOD is currently primarily the preserve of cable and satellite delivery of content on request, whereas web-based video is more often understood as instant-play streaming or as (unauthorized or licensed) downloads.

Around 2000, when VOD appeared on the scene, DVD was still growing in popularity and revenues. In fact, VOD was understood as a new model for home video as much as a new feature for cable subscribers. Speculative competition developed between studios, video stores, and cable providers. By the end of that year, Blockbuster test-marketed a version of "video on demand" as a temporary downloading platform that required set-top boxes in Seattle, Portland, and suburban Salt Lake City.[8] The *Los Angeles Times* reported a joint venture (later called Movielink) by Sony, MGM, Paramount, Universal, and Warner Bros. for an online pay VOD service as early as 2001 as a counterstrategy to Napster and piracy.[9] A couple weeks later, Disney and Fox announced similar plans.[10] Trade reports from the time reflect concerns that studio efforts to control VOD delivery and technology raised the potential for antitrust regulation, as well as the studios' am-

bivalence as they simultaneously developed their own VOD business models while resisting others.

For cable providers, VOD was initially less a way to compete with DVD than an alternative to the emergent digital video recorder (DVR) technologies and a mode of market distinction from satellite service providers such as Direct TV.[11] For cable subscribers, VOD adoption was actually driven less by paid movie orders than by instant playback of popular cable programming, particularly series rather than feature films. In 2003, HBO boosted on-demand usage up to fifty percent among cable subscribers when it made its original series such as *Sex and the City* available.[12] Viewership of "free" subscription content drove VOD on cable.

A *Variety* cover story in February 2003 about VOD attributed its slow development to the profitability of DVDs, studios' distrust of cable operators, and anxiety about new media technologies. DVD sales had grown 61% in 2002 alone.[13] In 2003 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that VOD revenues were dismal, with cable providers and studios blaming each other; at the time when DVD releases were a major revenue stream, studios delayed VOD availability, which was less profitable, by months. Cable operators suggested that new VOD titles were no longer new releases to home video, meaning that they had already nearly exhausted their appeal.[14] InDemand, rather than the studios themselves, quickly emerged as the leading pay-per-view distributor for new-release feature films circa 2002 and continues to negotiate and market mainstream studio features to the major cable providers nationwide. With the more recent decline in DVD sales, VOD is becoming a quicker if less sizable per-unit revenue stream. The trade journals closely reported as InDemand inched the release windows between home video and VOD releases closed to the point where they are now essentially simultaneous.

Although trade and newspaper reports have long emphasized box-office grosses, home video has long been key to profitability; the revenues for home video rental and sales, however, are closely guarded numbers. Despite the growth of web video and VOD, traditional home video releases continue to contribute a far more sizable share of film revenues (see chart 2). Even the ways these numbers are reported—differentiating kinds of video revenue streams—risk obscuring the fact that DVD rentals and sales together accounted for nearly double theatrical revenues. In part, the continued bounty from home video reflects the fact that far more profit is made per unit through conventional DVD releasing than through VOD (see chart 3). VOD continues to grow, but along with the growth of audience adoption has been a growth in competition from other companies entering the VOD market.

Chart 2: 2009 U.S. Film Revenues by Source

Domestic theatrical releases	$9.9 billion U.S.
Video sales*	$8.8 billion
*Wal-Mart's share of video sales	$3.7 billion
Video rentals	$8.1 billion
Video on Demand	$1.3 billion
Internet delivery	$.4 billion

Source: Martin Peers, "Wal-Mart's Vudu in Hollywood," *Wall Street Journal*, 24 February 2010, C14.

Chart 3: 2008 Studio Revenues Per Unit for Videos Sold

New release DVD	$11.63 U.S.
New release iTunes	$9.29
Catalog DVD	$6.54
Catalog iTunes	$6.17
Video on Demand	$1.92

Source: Georg Szalai, "One Analyst's Dire Predictions Give Digital White Knight White Knuckles," *Hollywood Reporter*, 16 July 2008, 8.

NOW PLAYING

Jokes have been made in the industry about the advantages of giving films titles starting with the letter "A" in order for them to appear atop VOD listings when audiences scroll through onscreen menus. According to Bocco, however, revenues still come down to the individual film, with some films clearly outperforming others. IFC Films has had particular success with controversial fare, whether on the arty end of the spectrum, such as *Antichrist*, or with horror/thriller content, such as *Dark Mirror* (2007). Films with name recognition still matter, and darker films work well for viewers who might not hire a babysitter and go to the theater but who might stay home and order a titillating VOD feature after the kids have gone to bed. Economically for IFC Films, it has been worth taking risks on edgy fare with the VOD business model. Arthouse and grindhouse films, once upon a time defined by their venues and the experience of theatrical exhibition, have long been sustained and niche-marketed on home video. Now they seem to be at the forefront of VOD.

Cable companies take a fifty percent cut of VOD charges, though the trade press has indicated that cable operators' accounting has been less than transparent. The actual revenues that then trickle down to filmmakers from IFC Films' share of VOD revenues has also become a point of contention. The revenues, after cable operators' share and IFC Films' overhead, tend, generously, toward the low six-figure range. Even though the numbers may be depressingly low compared to the costs of making a film, such numbers

are actually generally more beneficial to filmmakers than theatrical releasing, the cost of which is much higher.[15]

VOD has also altered the hierarchies and timelines for theatrical and home video releases. For the major studios, VOD windows are now typically synched with DVD releases. (This may soon be shifting to simultaneous VOD and theatrical with Comcast's merger with NBC Universal.[16]) In contrast, for independents such as IFC Films and Magnolia, VOD is often simultaneous with theatrical releases, with a DVD release later. IFC Films has specifically delayed DVD release to build VOD.[17] In IFC Films' case, not all films offered for VOD receive a DVD release. Among those that do, approximately ten prestige films per year are released through the Criterion Collection. Yet even these titles now stream on Netflix in advance of tangible DVD release. (IFC Films entered a streaming agreement with Netflix in November 2009, initially offering catalog titles before alternatively offering streams of films before their DVD release.[18] IFC Films also began selling videos on iTunes in 2007.) According to Bocco, streaming rather than actual DVD releases is probably the future for home video.

If VOD presents an alternative to theatrical exhibition, streaming video has emerged as an alternative to DVD releasing. In both cases, digital delivery is simply more cost-effective for content and delivery providers. Whereas YouTube developed user adoption for streaming video and Hulu.com developed the audience for high-quality streams of network-authorized television content, Netflix has been the leader in redefining the role of streaming in home video. Anecdotally, it seems that Netflix streaming has become so popular that I occasionally find myself reminding friends that the company still mails DVDs when they complain that not every title is available for streaming. According to *Variety*, this shift has paid off, with Netflix's revenues nearly doubling since it started streaming videos in 2007.[19] In part, again, this is about lowered costs for delivering content. Netflix spends ninety cents for each disc it mails but only five cents for each video it streams.[20] As Netflix has begun making more high-value licensing agreements, the costs for streaming rights will certainly push the cost per stream higher. Through top-dollar licensing agreements, "'Netflix did everybody in the industry a favor by establishing that streaming rights have real value,' says a top executive at a major." [21] DVD revenues, meanwhile, appear to be in freefall, with *Variety* reporting that rentals declined 14% and sell-through 11% during the first quarter of 2010, compared to 2009.[22]

The shift from expensive theatrical releases to multi-platform digital delivery opens up new and increasingly accessible ways for audiences to see art, documentary, and independent cinema. Such viewing less and less often takes place on film in a cinema. By changing the release patterns and delivery technologies, more films might find audiences, but the revenues for specific hits may be consistently lower. Furthermore, there is a curious contradiction between the formal rigor of these films and their various presentation formats, between their progressive politics and the fact that their distribution has been enabled through distributors that bridge different kinds of media ownership. These companies not only illustrate the ever-more "virtual life of film" but rethink and redefine the concepts of independent media and distribution.

1. John Dempsey, "'Greek Wedding' Goes High-Def," Variety, February 11, 2003.
2. Geraldine Fabrikant, "Showdown Begins in Movie-Rental Business; Blockbuster Tries a Remake," *New York Times*, July 26, 2004, C8.
3. Scott Hettrick, "MGM, IFC Conceive 'Babys' Plan," *Variety*, April 13, 2004, 4.
4. Arianna Bocco, interview with author, August 26, 2010.
5. Dave McNary, "Specialty Biz Scores with Home Run," *Variety*, June 8, 2009, 1.
6. Paul Sweeting, "TW May Throw Open Window to Digital Age," *Variety*, June 5, 2000, 11.
7. Jennifer 8. Lee, "Interactive TV Is Finally Here, Sort Of," *New York Times*, April 4, 2002, G1.
8. Brett Sporich, "Blockbuster Tests VOD in Select Cities," *Hollywood Reporter*, December 21, 2000, n.p.
9. Karen Kaplan and Corie Brown, "5 Studios Plan Joint Venture to Offer Movie Downloads," *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 2001, A1.
10. Jon Healey and Richard Verrier, "Disney, Fox Join in Web Film Venture," *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 2001, C1.
11. Jesse Hiestad, "Cabler's Hopes Ride on VOD," *Hollywood Reporter*, December 5, 2002, 6.
12. Meredith Admur, "Addition of HBO Spurs VOD Demand," *Variety*, October 17, 2003, 8.
13. Meredith Amdur, "What's the Holdup with VOD?" *Variety*, February 10, 2003, 1.
14. Jon Healey, "Video on Demand Not Yet a Big Movie Player," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 2003, C1, C4.
15. Anthony Kaufman, "Industry Beat: Why VOD Is Turning into a Profitable Avenue for Indie Filmmakers," *Filmmaker Magazine*, fall 2009, accessed at filmmakermagazine.com.
16. Cynthia Littleton, "Comcast' Ripple Threat," variety.com, posted October 2, 2010.
17. Gregg Goldstein, "IFC: Day-date bows on VOD, Movie Screens," *Hollywood Reporter*, January 24, 2006, 8. John Dempsey, "Cabler Opens Indie Windows," *Variety*, February 28, 2006, 1. Jeremy Kay, "On-Demand in Demand," *Screen International*, March 3, 2006.
18. Sharon Swart, "IFC Joins Stream Team," variety.com, posted November 19, 2009.
19. Tom Lowry, "Shattered Windows," *Variety*, August 26, 2010, 5.
20. Tom Lowry, "Netflix Makes Waves in Hollywood," variety.com, posted August 21, 2010.
21. Tom Lowry, "Shattered Windows," *Variety*, August 26, 2010, 5.
22. Peter Caranicas, "Studios at the Brink," *Variety*, May 3, 2010, 3.

LUCAS HILDERBRAND is Assistant Professor of Film and Media Studies at the University of California, Irvine, and author of *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright* (Duke University Press, 2009).

ABSTRACT An account of the rise of Video on Demand as a method of distribution for arthouse and independent films, focusing on the IFC Films and Magnolia Pictures companies, and charting the growing success of streaming video as opposed to DVD and theatrical releasing.

KEYWORDS Video on demand, film distribution, IFC Films, Magnolia, digital video

NEAR DARK: AN APPRECIATION

LEO BRAUDY LOOKS BACK AT KATHRYN BIGELOW'S REVISIONIST VAMPIRE FILM

Kathryn Bigelow's directing Oscar for *The Hurt Locker* has been duly honored, but usually without much consideration of her steps along the way. Does she have a career that can be equally celebrated, or is this film somehow an anomaly, the result of the Academy members wanting to pay tribute to a woman director, while cocking a snook at her ex-husband James Cameron and the blockbuster *Avatar*? In fact, so much commentary focused on the lack of business done by *The Hurt Locker* compared to the other nominees that a whole set of extraneous reasons for its Best Picture prize seemed almost explicit, despite awards as well for editing, sound, sound editing, and original screenplay.

I have to admit that I enjoyed *The Hurt Locker*, but was not really a great fan of it. Primarily because it seemed to me to be too simple, too much of a paring down of what I like best in Bigelow's work, the sense of nuance and depth that she has brought to much of her genre storytelling. *The Hurt Locker* to me is in essence a small-scale story given full-scale production. It is a virtuoso articulation of the ability of a director to create and the ability of the audience to experience situations of extreme tension, when you don't know exactly what will happen but know that it will certainly be, literally and figuratively, explosive.

Nevertheless, an auteurist case can be made for Bigelow, especially in terms that characterize so many of the more prominent directors of the New Hollywood—a later generation mixture of auteurist personal vision with an abiding interest in and complex awareness of the pressures and necessities of genre. Somewhat older directors such as Coppola, Spielberg, Lucas, and Scorsese similarly shape their own auteurist imaginations through the lens of genre revisionism. Two themes seem prominent in Bigelow's earlier films that permeate *The Hurt Locker* as well: the exploration of the style of masculinity that seeks adrenaline-charged borderline risk situations, and the potential and actual threat to any group when it depends on one of these hotdog berserkers. This friction between an extreme version of the conventional hero and the needs of a larger group seems to me to be a constant element in the plots that attract Bigelow. In *The Hurt Locker* it's a theme that also carries a social charge through a behind-the-camera irony about the relative value of stars and supporting actors: the way in which the virtual unknown Jeremy Renner manages to survive all his foolhardiness, while the more famous Guy Pearce and Ralph Fiennes get killed off with dispatch.

But rather than do a step-by-step through Bigelow's career, I want to focus particularly on one of her earliest films, *Near Dark*, a film that I have a great fondness for, and one that, for all its preoccupation with the ostensibly lowly vampire genre, is more nuanced and subtle than *The Hurt Locker*.

⁂

Bigelow's first feature was *The Loveless* (1982), which was co-written and co-directed with Monty Montgomery. Her next films, *Near Dark* (1987) and *Blue Steel* (1990), were written with Eric Red, who a year before *Near Dark* had written the script for another film with a similar mood and setting, *The Hitcher*. They also collaborated on the script for *Undertow*, which was finally produced for television in 1996, with Red directing.

The Loveless, *The Hitcher*, and *Near Dark* share a fascination with the open spaces of American highways, the diners, rundown garages, and eccentric walk-on characters of a road movie. *The Loveless* especially is more like a noirish road poem than a story, with a rambling plot narrated by Willem Dafoe, who plays the main character, an enigmatic biker who knows the other biker gangs but doesn't have much to do with them. Its interest is more in the discontented mood of the road with its haphazard encounters and its tenuously related situations. As Bigelow has said on the 2002 two-disc DVD edition, she and Montgomery tried to stay away from

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 29–32, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.29

conventional screenwriting structure in making the film. Dafoe's voiceover is the only real coherence that the film has. But that voice and his onscreen presence is often enough to create a more melancholic tribute to the grindhouse biker films of earlier decades than Tarantino's more frenetic, action-oriented homages.

The Hitcher, directed by Robert Harmon, amps up the conflict with the frantic efforts of Jim Halsey (C. Thomas Howell) to find out why the charming psychopath John Ryder (Rutger Hauer) has chosen him to draw into his ring of death and destruction. The only significant woman in the story, the androgynously named Nash (Jennifer Jason Leigh), is a waitress who believes Howell's story when he's being chased by police for crimes committed by Ryder. Her later death by being pulled apart between two trucks (it happens offscreen) increases the over-the-top violence at the same time that it suggests a homoerotic resonance to Halsey's constant questioning of Ryder about why he's the target. As a cop in the film later says, "There's something strange going on between the two of you. I don't know what it is, and I don't want to know." This is less the love that can't speak its name, than the love that better not, since it would reduce the whole plot to a psychological cliché. Clearly in debt to early 1970s films like *Duel*, *Vanishing Point*, and *Sugarland Express*, *The Hitcher* is essentially a Frankenstein-on-the-road film that is saved from pure exploitation by its somber Western setting, and by Hauer's shy smile and charismatic performance as the unmotivated, implacable Ryder—a genre type that Bigelow and Red revisit in the character of Eugene Hunt (Ron Silver) in *Blue Steel*.

Like so many other films of the 1970s and 80s, all three of these films play with genre conventions—of the biker film, the chase film, the vampire film—setting them in visually open spaces, with roads stretching to the horizon, creating an atmosphere of freedom that seems to mock the frequently doomed, enclosed lives of their protagonists. *Near Dark* also shares with *The Hitcher* the pattern of a somewhat feckless young man who is faced with a malevolent antagonist and is forced to grow up fast, a coming of age in which he has to recognize the limits of his knowledge and the innocent gullibility of his own emotions.

Placing what are basically genre-driven plots and characters within a world of visual openness can usefully invoke a play against limits that threads through every aspect of a film. Unlike, say, the mode of genre excess taken by contemporary horror directors like Rob Zombie and Eric Roth, Bigelow in *Near Dark* always gives a human interiority to her supposed villains, revealing the potential doppelganger side of the vampire form, since vampires in most lore are not born but made; each was once like you and me. At the same time she daringly stages such complex scenes of violence as a disturbing battle with potential victims in a roadhouse, and a spectacular action sequence when the vampires are trapped by state police in a ramshackle motel. Much of the film's visual power also comes from the play between light and dark, especially those night scenes in which isolated sources of light are exploited by Adam Greenberg, the director of photography (who did both *The Terminator* and *Terminator* 2), to create an eerie luminosity around action that still remains recognizably normal, the preternatural glow bringing together the worlds of the natural setting and the supernatural abilities of the characters.

Although producer Steven-Charles Jaffe on the DVD refers to *Near Dark* as "the first non-Gothic vampire film," there are several other contenders for that honor, from the 1950s rarity *The Return of Dracula* to George Romero's great analysis of the logic of vampire assumptions in *Martin*, released in 1977. Especially in the 1970s, while some writers were trying to historicize Dracula and connect him to the fifteenth-century Wallachian ruler Vlad the Impaler, and Anne Rice was beginning her series of vampire novels with *Interview with the Vampire*, various films treated the figure comically (*Love at First Bite*), updated the Lugosi film (John Badham's *Dracula* with Frank Langella), or went back to roots (Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu*).

To a certain extent, then, *Near Dark* is a latecomer in this self-conscious but fertile rethinking of the vampire genre. But while *The Loveless* and *The Hitcher* are still interesting to watch for their sense of visual mood, *Near Dark* meditates on the elements of its genre past and enriches them to create a genre landmark. Whereas Romero in *Martin* takes out his scalpel and pares away virtually everything that signifies vampire until he has the story down to what seem to be its basics, Bigelow infuses Red's script with a sense of longing and nostalgia that makes one recall the promise that Dracula always proffered his chosen (rather than casual) victims of escaping a dreary normality to gain eternal life.

⁂

The first shots of the film are disorienting—a closeup of a mosquito inserting its proboscis into the flesh of a man in a cowboy hat, while twangy electronic music by Tangerine Dream plays on the soundtrack. What kind of movie is this, the unclued-in observer might ask. The familiar genre signs aren't obviously there, although in retrospect they stand out boldly. The story proper begins in a small town, somewhere in the Great Plains, where Caleb (Adrian Pasdar) and two friends are hanging out at a local motel, sporting cowboy boots and jeans, with nothing to do. They spot a girl eating

A vampire Western

Near Dark. © 1987 Near Dark Joint Venture. DVD: Optimum Releasing (U.K.).

an ice cream cone, and Caleb makes his move. It seems like a normal, even boring world, with few possibilities and less future. But below the surface lurks the subtext, expressed in innuendo as blatant as Dracula's but more seemingly normal.

"Can I have a bite?" asks Caleb flirtatiously. "Bite?" she answers.

"Dying for a cone," he continues. "Dying?"

Soon enough Caleb will be entangled in the life of a vampire "family" on the road, of which the girl, Mae (Jenny Wright), is a part. But instead of the tuxedoed Draculas of the past or even the well-dressed Renfields and Minna Harkers, these are world-weary vampires in blue denim, sweatshirts, Jesse James-like dusters, and a whole array of other retro clothing. Immortal perhaps, but like the genre itself, fallen, forced to wander over the plains, stealing cars, staying out of daylight, and looking for victims. There's a tremendous sense of nostalgia permeating *Near Dark* that springs directly from viewing the vampire story through the lens of the genre of the belated Western, in which young boys hankering to be cowboys hang out desperately in dead-end small towns, the old heroic myth of the West long vanished.

The vampire family (Lance Henriksen, Jenette Goldstein, Bill Paxton, Wright, and Joshua John Miller) at first wants to kill Caleb, but then at Mae's urging (she has already "turned" him) gives him a series of chances to prove himself as a new member. This array of parents and children bears some analogy to the monster families of the 1970s in such films as *The*

Texas Chain Saw Massacre and *The Hills Have Eyes*. But they are more richly and psychologically imagined: the parental indulgences and romantic bond of Jesse (Henriksen) and Diamondback (Goldstein), the boyish exuberance of Severen (Paxton—a surprise if all you know of him is the somber and harried Bill Henrickson of *True Love*), the budding young womanhood of Mae, and the aggressive teenager Homer (Miller). The fact that Henriksen, Paxton, and Goldstein had been part of the cast of *Aliens* the year before further confirms the depth of their relationship, bolstering the basic intertextuality of a genre film with the behind-the-scenes bond of casting.

But Caleb has another family as well, intriguingly without a mother, his father a veterinarian, whose profession will become crucial to the story, and a young sister, who will become the prey of Homer, the youngest in the vampire family, who often sports a William S. Burroughs T-shirt. The conflict between these two families is at the core of the story as well, and it's not so obvious which is preferable: the violent, risky world of the "evil" vampires whose sense of adventure lures Caleb out of his small-town doldrums; or the bucolic, pleasant, but ultimately bland and boring world of his real family.

When do we in the audience decide what kind of film this is? How do we read it? There are few obvious special effects, and the use of wipes and the ending freeze frame ties it less to the uncanny than to more time-honored techniques of movie storytelling. I've tried to convey something of the richly mixed allegiances of *Near Dark* to its genre forebears. To these might also be added an aspect of the Dracula story already there in Stoker, but which has become a staple of the current round of "new" vampire films. I call this the Ondine motif, because it celebrates the effort to cross the boundaries between the outwardly human and the ostensibly other, giving up the world of immortality and choosing the finite world of human love.

Taking a codified genre, mixing it with other allied genres, and changing its seemingly fixed rules raises the intriguing question of genre development over time. In an often-reprinted article ("*Chinatown* and Generic Transformation in Recent American Film") John G. Cawelti, faced with the many 1970s films that spun traditional genres in different directions, outlined four ways he thought the changes could go: burlesque, inversion, nostalgia, and demythologizing. All these possibilities deconstruct the genre and reveal its assumptions as artificial and in need either of reaffirmation or dismissal. But, I would add, even devastating attacks against the genre's basic view of the world (as in, say, *Kiss Me Deadly* or *Martin*) do not necessarily kill it off. What *Near Dark* and so many vampire films up to the present reveal is that meditation on a genre's "code" may also re-energize it, enabling a more complex view not just of the genre itself but also its relation to other genres and other stories, as the pure form and its variations play fruitfully against one another. In *Near Dark* particularly, this new source of energy comes from an explicit awareness of the long history of the form that, like the immortality of the vampires themselves, has become attenuated and in need of fresh blood.

⁂

Finally, to return to Kathryn Bigelow, how does she as director oversee and implement these issues? How does her fascination with the vampire story and its possibilities express her personal vision, collapsing the otherwise seemingly contradictory categories of repetitive genre and original auteur? Lance Henriksen in the DVD discussion talks about his preference for Bigelow's matriarchal style in directing rather than the patriarchal he had previously experienced. It was more nurturing, he explains, leaving room for improvisation and more accepting of suggestions from cast and crew. How this collaborative atmosphere may have contributed to the ambiance of real and unreal families in the film seems obvious. But without going into the question of male versus female directing traits, let me suggest a transgender analogy: among other directors, Bigelow reminds me most of Howard Hawks, another filmmaker traditionally celebrated as an auteur who was yet fascinated by genre storytelling, the dynamics of groups, and the grounding of genre artifice in a palpable, often expansive reality. What I miss in *The Hurt Locker* are what I believe to be the strengths of *Near Dark*, the nuances and shadings, both visual and verbal, that create a complex world. *Near Dark* came out virtually the same day as *The Lost Boys*, and was for the moment swamped by that film's success. But its audience has grown over the years—a tribute to its lasting power.

LEO BRAUDY is the author of *The World in a Frame* (University of Chicago Press) and the co-editor of *Film Theory and Criticism* (Oxford University Press). His new book is *The Hollywood Sign: Fantasy and Reality of an American Icon*, forthcoming from Yale University Press.

DVD DATA *Near Dark*. Director: Kathryn Bigelow. © 1987 Near Dark Join Venture. Publisher: Starz/Anchor Bay, 2 discs. (The most recent U.S. edition of the film is published by Lions Gate, $14.98, 1 disc.)

ABSTRACT A reconsideration of Kathryn Bigelow's 1987 revisionist vampire film, *Near Dark*, in terms of its small-town ambience, visual openness, melancholic mood of nostalgia, outsider characters, and genre mix of horror and belated Western.

KEYWORDS Kathryn Bigelow, *Near Dark*, vampire films, Eric Red, *The Hitcher*

UNDOING VIOLENCE: POLITICS, GENRE, AND DURATION IN KATHRYN BIGELOW'S CINEMA

CAETLIN BENSON-ALLOTT SURVEYS AN INNOVATIVE CAREER IN AND OUT OF HOLLYWOOD

In her thirty years as a feature film director, Kathryn Bigelow has amassed an impressive *oeuvre* of films celebrated for their radical representations of race and gender as well as their innovative cinematography and action sequences. These aspects often overlap, as when she encourages viewers to rethink action-hero masculinity by breaking with genre conventions and slowing down cinematic violence in her first feature, *The Loveless* (1982); her blockbuster, *Point Break* (1991); and her recent Oscar-winner, *The Hurt Locker* (2008). Bigelow's work presents an ongoing engagement with Hollywood genres but is neither simply subversive nor easily classifiable as commercial. Instead, her career has followed an unusual trajectory as she has been both insider and outsider in relation to mainstream cinema. Along the way, her engagements with the U.S. film industry and its genres have been paradoxical and provocative. Her big-budget blockbuster for Twentieth Century Fox, *Strange Days* (1995), flopped, whereas *The Hurt Locker* was independently produced yet brought Bigelow many prestigious awards, including the 2010 Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Director.

Bigelow's shifting relationship to Hollywood forms is also reflected in the fact that she has repeatedly commissioned purpose-built camera equipment to create unique mobile shots within established generic conventions. Dynamic maneuverings also characterize the plots of her films, which feature marginal or countercultural characters in conflict with social norms. Often valorizing an outsider position, the films search for a balance between rebellion and social order in both narrative and form—although some do fail to find it. This is especially the case in *Strange Days*, where a relatively bold treatment of police racism is ultimately subordinated to a conventional romantic ending. Yet while an isolated reading of *Strange Days* might conclude that progressive politics and generic formulae make uneasy bedfellows, taken in the wider context of Bigelow's *oeuvre*, the film's visible compromises instead suggest a struggle to create new meaning from Hollywood convention.

In what follows, I explore Bigelow's films chronologically and in terms of these recurring tensions and conflicts; I view her *oeuvre* as a set of questions and engagements rather than a predetermined auteurist statement. Too often, Bigelow's champions (of which she has and deserves many, in both the academy and the industry) impose an overly unified interpretation of her filmmaking. This reflects an understandable desire for coherence, but at the same time it does the films a disservice by downplaying their dynamism, not to mention the significant industrial and artistic challenges Bigelow has faced throughout her career. Each film grapples with these challenges uniquely, and it is only by recognizing their respective struggles that an accurate image of Bigelow's auteurism emerges.

THE LOVELESS AND *NEAR DARK*

In the years leading up to her first feature, Bigelow studied painting at the San Francisco Art Institute and New York's Whitney Museum. She was very involved with New York's conceptual art scene, particularly the 1970s artists' collaborative Art and Language, which critiqued commodity culture. Bigelow's early work benefited from her apprenticeships with Vito Acconi, Richard Serra, and Lawrence Weiner; she also acted in Lizzie Borden's 1983 feature *Born in Flames*, a fictional account of a feminist revolution that blends genre and political filmmaking in what might be considered a model for Bigelow's later work. While working with Art and Language, Bigelow began a short film, *The Set-Up* (1978), which she submitted as part of her MFA at Columbia University. A reflection on the fascistic appeal of screen violence, *The Set-Up* laid the foundation for many of the production techniques that define Bigelow's later work, including rigorous storyboarding and intensive collaboration with actors, editors, and other directors.[†] However, Bigelow's recent interviews

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 33–43, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.33

suggest ambivalence toward the film's overtly philosophical framework. In a 1995 *Film Comment* interview with Gavin Smith, reprinted in Deborah Jermyn and Sean Redmond's collection, *The Cinema of Kathryn Bigelow: Hollywood Transgressor* (Wallflower Press, 2003), Bigelow coyly encourages viewers to regard *The Set-Up* as a "politically literal" text about violence (29). This reductive account of the film belies its real violence, as Bigelow asked her actors to actually beat and bludgeon each other throughout the film's all-night shoot. More recently, she has affirmed critic Amy Taubin's view that *The Set-Up* "contains in embryo everything that would preoccupy Bigelow through the seven feature films that followed," thereby recuperating the project even if she now rejects the way she executed it (*Film Comment*, May/June 2009).

That critical distance from her own work is already visible in her 1982 feature, *The Loveless*, co-directed with Monty Montgomery. It is a sedate, almost anti-narrative homage to post-war biker films such as Laslo Benedek's classic, *The Wild One* (1953). Whereas *The Set-Up* supplements its gory on-screen violence with voiceover commentary from two Columbia University professors—a somewhat didactic technique—*The Loveless* offers only the most clichéd narration by its central character. His trite asides provide no key to the film's interpretation, so the viewer is obliged to confront the film's visual style without pedagogy or guidance. Bigelow's first feature is no less philosophical in its approach to questions of representation than *The Set-Up* as it invites us to reconsider familiar subject matter. Through deliberately stilted dialogue and slow camera movements, it creates critical distance between spectator and narrative that throws the film's still landscapes and shut-down lives into stark relief. In this languorous atmosphere, nothing much happens, so the viewer starts to ask where violence will come from and why she is waiting for it.

The film begins at dawn in a nondescript Southern bayou. To the tune of Eddy Dixon's "Relentless," the camera waits beside a mint-condition Indian motorcycle for its rider to appear. When he does, it pans up his iconic black boots, jeans, and leather jacket to discover Willem Dafoe's now-iconic scowl. *The Loveless* was the actor's first film, but its focus on his intensely disaffected demeanor establishes the template for his subsequent cultural prominence (while also emphasizing the biker hero's customary alienation). Yet even as the film invokes such generic conventions, the soundtrack unsettles viewers' expectations. For when the camera reaches Dafoe's face, the music stops and the diegetic hush of the bayou takes over. In this quietude, the camera pulls back into a long shot of the biker donning his gloves, taking a first and then a second try at starting his bike, and slowly entering a quiet highway. When "Relentless" eventually recommences (about halfway through the shot), it no longer seems to refer to the biker; instead it comments on the shot itself. Relentless duration characterizes *The Loveless*'s cinematography and its anti-narrative. Whereas most road movies dare the spectator to keep up, *The Loveless* challenges her to endure, to sit through shots that—like the bikers themselves—seem to be going nowhere. For nothing much happens—but this nothing much nonetheless produces abrupt, brutal, and devastating violence.

Setting therefore becomes very important for *The Loveless*, most of which takes place in an economically depressed truck-stop town where Dafoe's Vance and his gang undertake some minor mechanical repairs. While in town, the gang does everything movie bikers are supposed to do: they intimidate the local boys, flirt with the waitresses, threaten the patriarchs, and spout impossibly cool, cryptic slang. The mundane familiarity of their behavior enables the film to spend more time contemplating the gang's boredom than advancing the plot. What plot there is seems to progress almost by chance, as when an androgynous young woman, Telena (Marin Kanter), happens into the gas station, flirts with Vance, then takes him for a ride to a local motel. In a mid-drive anecdote, Telena reveals that her father has been sexually abusing her since her mother's suicide, yet when her father later drags her from the motel, Vance barely moves, as if resisting the call of a Hollywood revenge plot. Telena subsequently takes her own revenge by showing up at her father's favorite bar with a gun, but the film presents the timing of this reprisal as almost arbitrary. It could just as easily have happened another evening, or not at all. Indeed, the pace of the film makes its violent conclusion feel without context, because without a narrative arc supporting it, it cannot bear any larger social or symbolic significance. In short, by manipulating the rhythm of the biker genre, Bigelow and Montgomery divest it of its conventional ideological closure and suggest that violence does not necessarily contain meaning. In most action-oriented B-movies, a narrative arc codes climactic bloodshed as a crucial precursor to resolution; violence creates the new status quo. *The Loveless* asks what violence can mean—if it means anything—without its conventional framing or when it seems more closely associated with boredom than righteousness.

Near Dark (1987) extends Bigelow's interrogation of character motivations and screen violence and develops her aesthetic in important ways—most notably in her use of lighting and color. The film opens with a sunset. The warm sepia and orange tones of a Midwestern evening give way to a blue-black night as the film's cowboy protagonist, Caleb (Adrian Pasdar), goes hunting for beer and girls. As in *The*

Kathryn Bigelow directing *The Hurt Locker*
Courtesy of Summit Entertainment.

Loveless, cool lighting palettes play a significant role in Bigelow's evocation of small-town tedium, and ennui again brings the threat of violence, this time to Caleb's encounter with his similarly bored friends. However, in *Near Dark*, cinematographer Adam Greenberg's electric blue moonlight enhances the vampire film's distinctive combination of horrific surrealism and melancholic romanticism. Greenberg developed this aesthetic while working on James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984), where it contributes to a futuristic dystopia set in contemporary L.A. *Near Dark* likewise exploits Greenberg's fluorescent blue light to illuminate new worlds in familiar terrain. It dramatizes the vampires' unconventional hunger and how that hunger produces not only alternative circadian rhythms but also the alternative kinship networks of their nocturnal world. However, *Near Dark*'s vampires are less inclined to existential debate than the ones in *The Hunger* (1983) or *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). Those vampires discuss the nature of their plight, but Bigelow's monsters seem bored by self-reflection. For them, the nomadic lifestyle is a test of endurance and the will to survive, and the film's ethereal, immobilizing blue light and slow camera movements represent their exclusion from ordinary time.

The lighting also conveys how violence has become the preferred means of marking—or perhaps killing—time for Bigelow's vampires (and maybe for the movie audience too). The lighting creates a contrast between lyrical scenes of immortal leisure and and the film's gruesome feeding sequences, which employ a very different aesthetic. In the most notorious set piece, *Near Dark*'s predators—including Lance Henriksen's dissolute Jesse, Bill Paxton's sadistic Severin, and Jenny Wright's androgynous yet maternal Mae—attack an isolated Texas roadhouse, and as they effectively turn the bar into an abattoir, Bigelow and Greenberg use hot fluorescent lights to reveal every drop of spilt blood. The scene also deviates from *Near Dark*'s otherwise leisurely pace; instead Bigelow and her editor, Howard E. Smith, build the roadhouse episode around the tight cuts and quick inserts common to splatter movies. The change in pace and style connects the film unmistakably to the horror genre, but it also offsets the horror element and isolates it from the film's more contemplative moments. In this way the viewer is

Top two: *The Loveless*. © 1981 Pioneer Films Corporation. DVD: Blue Underground. Next two: *Near Dark*. © 1987 Near Dark Joint Venture. DVD: Optimum Releasing (U.K.).
Bottom four: *Blue Steel*. © 1989 FSI-Precision Film Venture I Joint Venture. DVD: Lionsgate (U.K.).

allowed a certain detachment from the carnage once it is over—a detachment not dissimilar to the vampires'. Thus it appears that Bigelow utilizes the conventions of the horror genre both for their own power and to study the relationship to violence they produce.

BLUE STEEL AND *POINT BREAK*

Bigelow's subsequent trilogy of action films—*Blue Steel* (1989), *Point Break*, and *Strange Days*—merged her philosophically minded manipulation of pace with the market demands of mainstream filmmaking. In the process, Bigelow became recognizable as both a Hollywood brand and an auteur. All three films rethink the conventions of action cinema while exploring gendered and racial politics. This is not an easy project, and Bigelow did not always succeed in making genuinely progressive mainstream genre movies. Indeed, after *Strange Days* flopped she was forced to reassess her direction, but these attempts nonetheless offer fascinating evidence of the difficulty of addressing politically sensitive topics in Hollywood.

Blue Steel opens as Megan Turner (Jamie Lee Curtis) finishes the New York City Police Academy and begins work as a Manhattan beat cop. During her first day on the job, a deadly incident brings her into contact with a psychopath who subsequently begins to shoot random New Yorkers with bullets bearing Turner's name. This murderer, Wall Street trader Eugene Hunt (Ron Silver), only begins his rampage after he sees Turner kill an armed robber. Thus it would seem that violence begets violence, both for Hunt and for Turner, who repeatedly suggests that she chose to become a cop after growing up in an abusive household. Her violent occupation now defines her relationships with men, alternately attracting and repelling them. Her father is disappointed by her choice of profession, but it entices both her boss and the yuppie killer. Indeed, Hunt not only murders in Turner's name but also seeks her out romantically, inviting her to share a cab during a downpour and then charming her with expensive dinners and a helicopter ride.

As she does in *Near Dark*, Bigelow visualizes *Blue Steel*'s web of violence, gender, and power through lighting design. Most notable are the blue gels and kick lights that appear whenever Turner expects to wield control over men but does not. The dramatic power of the gels also creates a kind of temporal layering as they generate associations with previous scenes through color repetitions and associations. Specifically, the lights produce patterns that allow the viewer to see the effects Turner's father, the NYPD, and her romantic aspirations have on all her relationships. For example, blue light frames Turner's sexy red dress at the end of her second date with Hunt while she naively tries to convince her own stalker to come upstairs. Because the spectator already knows about Hunt's murderous behavior, Turner's sexual confidence seems foolhardy; where she sees romance, the spectator recognizes the blue glow of potential violence. The contrast between the blue light and Turner's red dress also recreates the color scheme of the NYPD police lights, dramatizing how her institutional relationship to violence persists in the background of her out-of-uniform femininity and sexuality. It is a subtle effect that emphasizes Turner's vulnerability and indicates the extent to which her profession is not a liberation. Likewise, when Turner must readopt police colors for her final confrontation with Hunt, the film makes consistent use of slow motion and color repetition to convey the dehumanizing violence these two sources of masculine threat enact on her. The film ends with an unsettling long take that questions the value of what Turner has endured. Through a minute-long medium close-up of her impassive profile, *Blue Steel* both abandons the violence it has portrayed and challenges any sense of it as empowerment, female or otherwise. Turner's stillness, isolation, and downcast eyes suggest defeat, not victory. The violence involved in conquering Hunt also conquered her.

Point Break similarly features masculinity as masquerade and a doomed romance—or "bromance," in the parlance of our times. In it, Johnny Utah (Keanu Reeves), another law enforcer, and bank robber Bodhi (Patrick Swayze) find themselves drawn into a violent homoerotic flirtation that raises questions about sexual normativity and the social order Utah represents. The film begins with a beautiful surfer, presumably Bodhi, riding the waves, intercut with another scene of em-bodhi-ed masculine performance: Utah completing an FBI Academy field test. Turner failed a similar exam at the beginning of *Blue Steel*, but Utah aces his, and *Point Break* represents his examination as a performance rather than a trial. Turner bears scrutiny unhappily, as if expecting to be found lacking, but Utah embraces attention, making a spectacle of himself at both FBI headquarters and on the beach, where he goes undercover as a neophyte surfer in order to infiltrate Bodhi's gang, the Ex-Presidents. Furthermore, Reeves's casting highlights masculine spectacle and stardom because *Point Break* premiered less than two years after his iconic turn as Ted Logan in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1989). Given the cultural prominence of the Logan character in the early 1990s, Reeves himself seems undercover as Utah—a surfer playing an FBI agent playing a surfer—which produces an ironic twist on idealized, action-film masculinity. Similarly, Swayze's bearing and reputation as a dancer invite the viewer to reinterpret his stunt work as choreography and so recognize

the physical demands of the genre. Finally—and whether by accident or design—neither Swayze nor Reeves turns in a particularly convincing dramatic performance, which has the effect of highlighting their androgynous grace and celebrity power over their realism as actors.

Arguably, then, Bigelow's casting and direction of Reeves and Swayze prompts a degree of metacinematic reflection that her cinematography encourages further. *Point Break* both slows down and speeds through the usual action set pieces to invite viewers to think about genre conventions and their typical masculinist focus on the individual. Take, for example, the scene in which Utah and his partner hunt down Bodhi's gang during its penultimate bank heist. The chase begins with an extended, rapidly intercut sequence as the two agents pursue the thieves through the Los Angeles sprawl of strip malls and parking lots, ending when the Ex-Presidents pull into a service station to swap cars. There the film cuts to a long shot as Bodhi, wearing a Ronald Reagan mask, turns a gas nozzle into a flamethrower to incinerate their ex-vehicle. Abandoning the 180-degree rule, the camera pans behind the gas pumps to contemplate the fire in slow motion before cutting in for a close-up of the grinning mask. The scene is both lyrical and formally transgressive because Bigelow's pacing and beautiful framing undermine the genre's ideological center without sacrificing excitement. A second virtuosic chase sequence follows, this one enabled by a lightweight modified Steadicam known as a Pogocam. As Utah pursues Bodhi on foot, an up-tempo surf-rock beat accompanies their journey through suburban alleyways, kitchens, and living rooms before coming to an abrupt halt in the L.A. River. Such tight turns as occur during this second chase are extremely hard to film and consequently quite rare in action movies, which is why Bigelow and her director of photography, Donald Peterman, had to develop their Pogocam to create the exhilarating sense of physical involvement the sequence gives its viewer.

In fact, tinkering with and advancing camera design is one of Bigelow's most celebrated engagements with genre convention, and in *Point Break* she premiers another modified Steadicam designed to mimic more accurately the movements of a human head. Bigelow and Peterman use it to manipulate the focalization and deepen the spectator's emotional involvement when Utah must temporarily join the Ex-Presidents to rescue a hostage. As the robbers enter the bank, the filmmakers swivel their camera like a human head, its focus scrambling over figures and fittings, struggling to make sense of the scene. At first, this terrified gaze seems to belong to Utah, the most disoriented and frightened protagonist in this scene. But then there is a sudden reverse shot to Utah, and when the spectator suddenly realizes that the gaze no longer belongs to him, she may become newly aware of an exhilarated empathy with the character. As the heist proceeds, the camera's movement becomes increasingly mobile and depersonalized, but the switch in viewpoints foregrounds the mechanics of identification in *Point Break*, and especially how Utah forms his homoerotic bond with Bodhi. Thus Bigelow's formal technique intensifies the film's dramatic tension while also mimicking processes of affiliation and identification that bond characters together.

STRANGE DAYS

Both *Blue Steel* and *Point Break* demonstrate Bigelow's interest in rethinking the action film and finding technological and aesthetic strategies to question its violence without sacrificing genre pleasure. This project also dominates *Strange Days*, a sci-fi thriller about a fictional new technology—the Superconducting Quantum Interference Device (SQUID)—that can record and replay every component of a user's experience. To create SQUID's first-person perspective onscreen, Bigelow and cinematographer Matt Leonetti spent over a year in preproduction developing an eight-pound, ultramobile camera that could move with the same smoothness and agility as the human eye. This allowed them to compose the film's notorious opening shot, a three-minute point-of-view long take in which an anonymous SQUID-wearer robs a Thai restaurant and dies trying to escape. Steven Shaviro offers a brilliant reading of this scene in "Straight from the Cerebral Cortex: Vision and Affect in *Strange Days*" (*The Cinema of Kathryn Bigelow: Hollywood Transgressor*), observing that "neither the doer nor the observer is a fixed, identifiable self. It is only with the interruption of the tape, at the death of the person whose POV we have been sharing, that we find out who the diegetic spectator is" (163). During this complicated play of identities, the film also cites both Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), thus combining its futuristic, neo-noir setting and technological innovation with a metacinematic reinterpretation of familiar film history.

Despite the device's artistic (and allegedly military) potential, most SQUID clips in *Strange Days* only offer their viewers cheap, sensationalist thrills. In an archetypal example, one businessman uses the equipment to perceive himself in the body of a young woman taking a shower. Thus Bigelow both indulges and exposes our appetite for sleazy imagery even as her film pursues loftier goals. *Strange Days* also outlines an antiracist critique of U.S. culture by recreating the 1992 Los Angeles riots in its eve-of-millennium setting. Bigelow sets this critique against the SQUID's sensationalist

Top four: *Point Break*. © 1991 Largo Entertainment (in the United States and Canada)/Largo International N.V. (in all other territories). DVD: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment (U.K.). Bottom four: *Strange Days*. © 1995 Lightstorm Entertainment Inc. DVD: Universal Studios (U.K.)

escapism, but ultimately it is confounded by an unusual conformism on Bigelow's part, specifically to the convention of Hollywood romantic endings. Ultimately, this compromise destroys both the film's progressive politics and Bigelow's career as a blockbuster filmmaker.

Strange Days revolves around an underground SQUID dealer, Lenny (Ralph Fiennes), and his investigation of the murder of his friend Iris (Brigitte Bako), a prostitute killed shortly after entrusting him with an unmarked clip. After two rogue cops chase and nearly kill Lenny and his sidekick

Mace (Angela Bassett) in an attempt to recover the clip, the latter decide to pick up Mace's son and hide out at a house party in South Central L.A. to find out what is on the tape. As they escape, Bigelow blends her signature blue light with orange street fires and Molotov cocktails that evoke the network news coverage of the 1992 L.A. riots. Once at the party, Lenny immerses himself in the clip while Mace watches her son dance with a sparkler. Presented in slow motion, this dance represents an apolitical, innocent alternative to the riots and Mace's subsequent agonized exposure to the clip. Unfortunately, this juxtaposition has the effect of marginalizing the clip's contents, as though the events it depicts ruptured a previous idyll. The clip begins as Iris flirts with a celebrity rapper and activist, Jeriko-One (Glenn Plummer), in his car. When the two cops pull him over, Jeriko accuses them of racial profiling and promises to publicize their prejudice, so they kill him. While Mace and Lenny are grievously surprised by this revelation of police racism, the scene feels sadly familiar to anyone knowledgeable about the 1992 riots, which followed the acquittal of four LAPD officers caught on video beating Rodney King. That footage, recorded by amateur videographer George Holliday, outraged viewers and was taken by many to be evidence of not just an isolated civil rights violation but decades of systemic brutality and bigotry.

Such deep-rooted social issues cannot be resolved in two hours, but *Strange Days* nonetheless offers a form of fictional closure through a conventional Hollywood double plotline. Put simply, the double plotline weaves together two stories, such as a political intrigue and a romance, so that the resolution of one (usually the romance) can stand in for or incorporate the other. In *Strange Days*, this narrative convenience subordinates Jeriko-One's assassination to Mace and Lenny's romantic union. Throughout the film, Mace repeatedly indicates her desire for Lenny, but he ignores the advances. Finally, as the clock strikes a new millennium, Lenny looks over his shoulder and suddenly reciprocates her unwavering affection. He kisses her, and the camera pulls back from their embrace to take in the way a riotous crowd, previously incensed by the murderous cops' last-ditch attack on Mace, suddenly becomes joyous and even affectionate. As the closing music rises, the couple's passionate embrace seems meant to represent hope for a new era. It may even remind the viewer of an earlier statement by Lenny's ex-girlfriend, Faith (Juliette Lewis), who said she prefers movies to real life because "the music comes up, there's credits, and you always know when it's over." Unfortunately, the problem of institutionalized racism is not over; *Strange Days* just neatly set it aside.

To be sure, celebrating a mixed-race couple is still radical in Hollywood film. Steven Shaviro even suggests that the ending might commandeer the double plot in order to stress its ideological limitations, specifically the lingering influence of the Hayes Code, which banned images of interracial affection. Yet for such a recuperative reading to be convincing, one might expect the characters themselves to recognize the political significance of their situation, that there is much more at stake in the Jeriko-One crisis than their love or desire. Instead, the film ends with Lenny observing, "We made it." This "we" explicitly refers to the happy couple; the question of whether his city will "make it" out of this political quagmire seems forgotten. And what hope can there be for antiracist reform in a movie whose heroes forget they were even on a mission? Finally, it is worth noting how these tensions affected the reception of the film. As Will Brooker demonstrates in "Rescuing *Strange Days*: Fan Reaction to a Critical and Commercial Failure" (also included in *The Cinema of Kathryn Bigelow*), many fans and critics give credit for *Strange Days*'s creative vision to Bigelow's ex-husband, James Cameron. This discourse reduces Bigelow's influence to the melodrama of the romantic couple and obfuscates the film's political aspirations as neatly as its conclusion. Whatever the ultimate failings of *Strange Days*, it deserves better than that.

THE WEIGHT OF WATER AND *K-19*

In the wake of the commercial failure of *Strange Days* (it grossed less than a fifth of its production budget), Bigelow presided over three highly acclaimed episodes of *Homicide: Life on the Street* and then adapted Anita Shreve's historical novel *The Weight of Water* (2000), which managed only a very limited theatrical release. Ironically, Bigelow's sixth film received scant notice for its study of female subjectivity even though *Near Dark*, *Blue Steel*, and *Strange Days* were all lauded for comparatively cursory treatments of the issue. It contains the most sustained and complex inquiry into women's relationships to violence, interweaving the stories of two women who respond violently to family crises and showing how gender roles contributed to their breakdowns. *The Weight of Water* opens as a contemporary photojournalist, Jean (Catherine McCormick), investigates the 1873 murder of two women on New Hampshire's Isles of Shoals. Jean invites her husband, a poet, and his brother along on her research trip, but much to her displeasure, the brother brings his new girlfriend, Adaline (Elizabeth Hurley), another writer who greatly admires Jean's husband. The film intercuts personal tensions with flashbacks to the true story of the Shoals murders, which were committed by a woman threatened by another sort of romantic rivalry.

As with *The Loveless*, *The Weight of Water* contains an implicit thesis on violence, namely that it happens more by

chance than by design, because of small decisions that might just as easily have been inconsequential. During an unexpected ocean squall, Jean has a moment to warn Adaline about an unsecured boom. Instead she does nothing and watches as the boom hits Adaline, knocking her into the water. In 1873, Maren Hondvedt (Sarah Polley) has to react to another threat to her family, and her response is no more premeditated than Jean's. When Maren's sister discovers her cuddling with their brother's wife, she threatens to expose not just this infidelity but also Maren's childhood affair with her brother. Before she has the chance, Maren kills both her and their sister-in-law. These crises allow Bigelow, her editor, and her cinematographer to explore how suddenly violence emerges and dissipates by slowly creating constrained atmospheres of frustration and animosity. Intercut with Maren's isolated existence on the Isles of Shoals, most of Jean's story takes place aboard her brother-in-law's yacht, where scenes of leisurely sailing contrast with the rapidly escalating feelings onboard. In these hermetic settings, tension builds slowly until there is a sudden burst of action. *The Weight of Water* exploits this effective narrative drama to succeed as a ruminative, experimental film that explores how violence can emerge gradually and then all at once.

This attention to pacing continues in Bigelow's next film. Starring Harrison Ford and Liam Neeson, *K-19: The Widowmaker* (2002) is set aboard a 1959 Soviet nuclear submarine and shares with *The Weight of Water* both a nautical setting and a developing interest in how human agency is shaped by environment. These films show Bigelow moving away from her earlier studies of ennui and action aesthetics toward *The Hurt Locker*'s exercise in sustained, unrelenting tension. In retrospect, *The Weight of Water* and *K-19* belong together with *The Hurt Locker* in a new phase of Bigelow's career, one in which slow-burning animosity and perseverance are the crucial themes. Perhaps most notably, the rivalry between *K-19*'s two captains, Vostrikov (Ford) and Polenin (Neeson), prefigures the uneasy interdependence of *The Hurt Locker*'s bomb squad. Both films also eschew the interstitial moments of light relief typical of many action genres. What is left is an endurance test for both characters and spectators caught up in the constant accumulation of suspense.

For the first hour of *K-19*, Vostrikov drills his crew after the submarine suffers a mechanical failure during a routine inspection. Although the test was routine, the breakdown is real, and the film plays with the confusion between simulated and actual perils as Vostrikov's drills strain both the spectator and the crew. However, they also increase the audience's connection with the crew as both tire of Vostrikov's games. When the crew must unite to mend a burst coolant hose in an overheating reactor, our identification with their ordeal allows *K-19* to alter the standard rhythm of an action movie—crisis and recovery, crisis and recovery—so that it can instead oscillate between suspense and tragedy. Bigelow and veteran editor Walter Murch first increase spectator anxiety by cutting rapidly between soldering irons and tense, sweating faces and then elongate other shots that emphasize small moments of devastatingly bad luck. At one point, they allow the camera to linger over Polenin's discovery that the repair crew will have to venture inside the reaction chamber without radiation suits because "the warehouse was out." Such temporal respites do not provide the viewer with any sort of reassuring levity; rather, the way they vary the tempo renews the spectator's sympathy for the crew members while also compounding their trouble. Last but not least, the film exploits the horrifying threat of radiation poisoning as Bigelow and Murch build a complete environment of danger.

THE HURT LOCKER

Menace and threat also proliferate in *The Hurt Locker*. As with the Hollywood trilogy, Bigelow succeeds in fashioning a highly exciting and visually involving film which at the same time interrogates genre conventions, specifically the way many war films distance or sanitize violence. One of the major ways in which Bigelow does this is to draw attention to her own media, which are not always film. *The Hurt Locker* includes low-resolution and high-speed digital video to represent soldiers' fractured experiences of high-tech warfare. Hers is not just a film and, by extension, not just a war film of either the jingoist or activist kind. Bigelow proves this point most subtly during the sharply detailed high-definition bomb explosions that expand her previous experiments with slow-motion cinematography and reconfigure the spatiality of violence. In *Strange Days* she uses slow motion to increase the spectator's investment in Mace's son as a counterpoint to the emotional impact of the Jeriko-One clip. Similarly, *Point Break* slows down to capture Reagan and Bodhi's gunfight and the fluid grace contained within this action sequence. Slow motion is a recurring technique in Bigelow's storytelling, often most successful where it is the most experimentally employed, where it can help the spectator participate in a collective meditation on action and affect.

To that end, *The Hurt Locker*'s first explosion deploys slow-motion HDV close-ups of road gravel and car rust rising from the force of the explosion to remove the viewer from the human scale of the blast and suggest the extensiveness of its destructive power. This adjustment of scale places a few moments of grace and beauty at the center of this

Top two: *The Weight of Water*. © 2000 StudioCanal France. DVD: Lions Gate. Next two: *K-19: The Widowmaker*. © 2002 IMF Internationale Medien und Film GmbH & Co. 2 Produktions KG. DVD: New Films International. Bottom four: *The Hurt Locker*. © 2008 Hurt Locker LLC. DVD: Lionsgate (U.K.).

scene of the death of Staff Sergeant Thompson (Guy Pearce). Bigelow prefaces this depersonalizing of the first explosion by visually emphasizing the free-floating paranoia of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal team. The film punctuates the team's nervous joking with rapid pans that become cuts—as if the camera were too jumpy to complete its movement—and bouncy handheld shots that alternate between point-of-view and defocalized perspectives. This technique generalizes the scene's tension and frees the film from any one character's experience. The movie maintains this distance when the bomb goes off, cutting first to the gravel and rust and then to a high-angle, slow-motion long take of Thompson running toward the camera. In a haunting twenty-second shot, his passing appears as the movement of smoke and debris, the smooth unfolding of a catastrophic event. The unearthly pace of the shot suggests a perspective outside of time, outside of all embodied, partisan positions. This is the hurt locker, the temporal and physical space of peril and pain that the film understands as beyond any sectarian frame. The scene's mournful, displaced lyricism defamiliarizes and depoliticizes its subject—there are no (living) voices, eyes, or subjective perspectives inside the hurt locker, only and always death. Critics as distinguished as A. O. Scott of *The New York Times*, Martha P. Nochimson of *Cineaste*, and Carla Seaquist of the *Christian Science Monitor* have expressed reservations about Bigelow producing such an apolitical war film, but as it plays out onscreen, *The Hurt Locker* succeeds because it upsets received war-film pacing. Its deliberate distance actually forces the spectator to slow down and think about the horror of military violence.

The Hurt Locker later expands this critique of war films by providing its spectator with only limited access to its characters and emphasizing their limited vision. During its opening exposition sequence, the film features close-ups of the sunglasses worn by Specialist Owen Eldridge (Brian Geraghty) as well as POV shots warped by the oblong distortion these glasses generate. During other bomb scenes, the camera shifts between the perspectives of its protagonists and of anonymous bystanders, none of whom seems to understand where the danger is coming from or why they are involved. The film further depersonalizes its analysis of the Iraq war by presenting its central character, Sergeant First Class William James (Jeremy Renner), as a cipher, blocking access to his emotions even at the expense of condemning the forces that imperil him. *Strange Days* is similarly dominated by a male protagonist, but whereas that film uses personalization as a retreat from politics, *The Hurt Locker* insists on James's unknowability in order to depsychologize the military relationship to death and violence. In the much-discussed shot of James standing alone in a supermarket aisle, having returned from his tour of duty, his blankness is again emphasized: he is utterly disconcerted by its plethora of breakfast cereals. As the film tells us, "war is a drug," and this is a man suffering withdrawal symptoms, ready to return to his addiction. The films accompanies this relapse with "Khyber Pass," an anti-Bush anthem by Ministry. However, the audience hears only the rousing, instrumental portion of the song and so its political dimension is hard to decipher. It is a fitting final note for a film that avoids taking sides in order to concentrate on fashioning an environment of unresolved and all-pervasive anxiety.

The controversies surrounding Bigelow and her treatment of screen violence in *The Hurt Locker* exemplify the complexities of trying to blend genre conventions and art-film technique in twenty-first century U.S. film culture. Her films rarely reveal Bigelow's political affiliations as transparently as critics would like; instead, her investigations of contemporary gender, race, and military politics unfold in her long shots and transitions, in her exploration of film as a time-based medium. Thus Bigelow's repeated engagement with Hollywood genres can best be understood as a challenge to hegemonic temporalities, to narrative orders that only engage some people's experiences of desire, violence, and death. Examining Bigelow's *oeuvre* in order, it is clear that her filmic experiments are not all equally successful, but together they suggest an artistic practice both indebted to and critical of sensationalist spectatorial engagement. At variable distances from Hollywood, more or less of an outsider herself, Bigelow makes films that challenge the way we think about the relationship of agency to environment, acknowledge the effects Hollywood genres have on the way we see the world, and invite us to see differently.

†One of the actors in *The Set-Up*, Gary Busey, also appears in *Point Break*. In addition, Bigelow has worked repeatedly with Bill Paxton, Tom Sizemore, Ralph Fiennes, and James Le Gros. These collaborations have drawn less attention than Bigelow's cooperation behind the camera with directors Monty Montgomery and James Cameron, screenwriters Eric Red and Christopher Kyle, and editor Howard E. Smith, who contributed to four of Bigelow's films.

CAETLIN BENSON-ALLOTT is Assistant Professor of English at Georgetown University.

ABSTRACT Kathryn Bigelow's eight feature films all seek a balance between progressive representations of gender and race and the demands of commercial filmmaking. Close attention to the filmmaker's experiments with duration and camera technology reveals her interest in reworking Hollywood conventions to critique conventionally masculinist genres.

KEYWORDS Kathryn Bigelow, *The Hurt Locker, Strange Days, The Weight of Water, Near Dark*

GHOST OF THE FIELDS: AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK KEILLER

NINA POWER TALKS TO THE BRITISH FILM ESSAYIST ABOUT *ROBINSON IN RUINS*

Patrick Keiller is Britain's foremost film essayist, part historian, part poet, part landscape photographer. *Robinson in Ruins* (2010) is the third part of what we could loosely call his Robinson trilogy, a highly idiosyncratic and strongly evocative set of journeys around Britain narrated by an anonymous speaker who in each film has a strong personal relationship to a mysterious figure known only as Robinson. The late Paul Scofield narrated the first two films, *London* (1994) and *Robinson in Space* (1997), while Vanessa Redgrave narrates *Robinson in Ruins*. (The warm, rich, port-soaked tones of these eminent actors lend a wry and knowing air to the proceedings.) Keiller's cinematic technique is designed to almost slow down time itself. Frequently unpopulated long takes permit a view of the slightest movement: the swaying of crops, a stray insect, a passing car.

Keiller is not only a filmmaker and writer, but also a former architecture lecturer and his most conventional documentary, *The Dilapidated Dwelling* (2000), deals with the housing crisis, or as he puts it in one interview "the predicament of the house in advanced economies" (www.audacity.org/Dilapidated%20Dwelling.htm). The past, present, and future state of British industry and politics are Keiller's main concerns, but in *Robinson in Ruins* he moves away from the first two films' mainly urban settings to observe the English countryside, that curious zone subject in the minds of suburbanites and city dwellers everywhere to a prelapsarian fantasy far removed from the reality of its revolutionary political history and heavy militarization. *Robinson in Ruins* is filmed in and around Oxfordshire (where Keiller lives) and is a contribution to The Future of Landscape and the Moving Image, a three-year research project involving Keiller and other researchers, which "sets out to explore received ideas about mobility, belonging and displacement in terms of landscape and images of landscape, in a context of economic and environmental change" (thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com).

It is hard for any filmmaker to avoid accusations of pretension the moment he or she starts including references to philosophers, artists, poets, urban theorists, scientists, political thinkers, and complex critiques of the global economic crisis, as Keiller does in *Robinson in Ruins*. Yet he manages it with charm, due to a combination of his mordant literary wit and his utterly serious (and very informative) investigations into what the narrator calls "the problem of England." The fictional character of the narrator and the ghostly presence of Robinson serve to lighten the often heavy theoretical load; their strangeness, their outsider situationism, prevent any sense of academicism. As Robinson and the narrator wander offscreen, often impoverished, barely relating to the world in its quotidian banality, yet all the time looking for some deeper meaning (in *Robinson in Ruins*, the title character is looking for ley-lines, among other things), Keiller weaves their anachronistic, pilgrim-like journeying into a trenchant account of national politics.

Following the first two films' investigation into Conservative rule during and after the Thatcher government, *Robinson in Ruins* is Keiller's attempt to come to terms with the New Labour project and to document the financial crisis that began in 2007 and continues to this day (the film concludes with the recent election of the U.K. coalition government). A slow but steady stream of references to oil prices, IMF warnings, the Iraq war, and the death of David Kelly (the British weapons expert who committed suicide after he was named as the BBC's source for critical remarks about the government's dossier on Iraqi weapons) are intermingled with shots of foxgloves, opium poppies, and rape-seed fields. Any separation between the countryside and political life we may have entertained vanishes completely, just as the film's antihero disappears before *Robinson in Ruins* even begins (leaving behind him nineteen film cans and a notebook in an abandoned caravan, which the narrator then pores over at a later date).

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 44–49, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.44

Patrick Keiller
Courtesy of London Film Festival.

In one of the single most brilliant shots, a spider is filmed meticulously spinning out its web while the narrator lists a series of recently failed banks, pointing to the utter fragility of a system built out of cobwebs and spun by those determined to structure the world in their own image, however delicate that world turns out to be. But the countryside has hidden strengths of its own: the narrator attempts to understand Robinson's interest in biophilia, symbiosis, and mutualism. In these marginal theories, nature is understood to work by cooperation (and we should not exclude machines from the possibility of coexistence—shots in which a tractor or combine harvester are seen in *Robinson in Ruins* are images of calm and productivity not exploitation). The revolutionary history of the British countryside—the Captain Swing riots, the fights against the enclosure acts, and the general rambunctiousness of the British peasantry of centuries past—are all remembered here with great and burning reverence. *Robinson in Ruins* may well be a document that explicitly takes its cue from a rather gloomy statement by Fredric Jameson in "The Antinomies of Postmodernity," collected in *The Cultural Turn* (Verso, 1998), "that it seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations," yet it is also a profoundly hopeful film, digging up the ruins of England and finding radical passion beneath.

Patrick Keiller answered my questions by email on October 17, during the London Film Festival (October 13–28), in which *Robinson in Ruins* was shown.

Nina Power: the British countryside is very unlike the ruralist fantasy many have of it, being in fact heavily militarized and crisscrossed by industry. *Robinson in Ruins* makes this very clear, yet there is at the same time in the film a specific politics of the countryside in the shape of symbiosis and mutualism (which could apply to the partnership of farm vehicles and other machinery as much as to the codependence of insects and plants). How far do you share Robinson's biophilia?

Patrick Keiller: during the years before I began the film, I had made a few still photographs of lichens, and had learned at some point that they were examples of symbiosis, though I think the lichen in the film was probably recruited more as part of a lichen–road sign hybrid. A hybrid, perhaps, as in

CITY AND COUNTRY

Left column: *London*. © 1994 British Film Institute. DVD: BFI (U.K.). Right column: *Robinson in Space*. © 1997 BBC. DVD: BFI (U.K.).

Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* [1991], which also led me to the Boyle–Hooke plaque [in Oxford, seen in the film]. I had been photographing foxgloves, too, for some time, without having any particular idea why, apart from their association, for me, with hilly landscapes in the north of Britain, and with the work of Beatrix Potter. I think it's probably also because they're quite zoomorphic, especially the tall ones. We have some in the garden. They're biennials.

When I encountered the term biophilia, only relatively recently, I was intrigued by the discussion, in a scientific context, of what seemed to be an aesthetic response. Also, while photographing the film, I had copied out a sentence from an obituary of Albert Hofmann: "Hofmann was born into a working class family in Baden, northern Switzerland, and as a child experienced memorable, revelatory encounters with nature." Looking it up now, I notice that this was on the evening of the day I photographed the cowslips, a few weeks before encountering the fields of opium poppies.

I tried to avoid using the word "nature" in the narration (though it does occur, in the quotations from Fredric Jameson and Edmund Burke, in the title of Marx's thesis, and as the name of the journal) in case it seemed to imply a view that some things are "natural" and others aren't. Obviously, there are differences in the way things come about, but the simple dichotomy seems unhelpful.

I was initially surprised to hear the narrator say that Robinson was originally German. I had thought of him (on the basis of the first two films) as being a grumpy, slightly paranoiac Englishman, out of both time and step with the world, yet endlessly looking beneath it for patterns of meaning. On reflection, however, his not-quite-nativeness seems to make sense—did Robinson always have this specific background and character for you, or has he changed over the years?

I don't think he is German. Vanessa Redgrave's character says that "Robinson wasn't his real name, and he wasn't English. He had arrived in London in 1966, from Berlin, before which his history was uncertain." In *Robinson in Space*, Paul Scofield's character said, over a picture of some industrial greenhouses: "Blackpool is Robinson's home town. His parents used to have a nursery which specialized in strains of giant vegetables." This is both an attempt to evoke *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* [1956, 1978], and a reference to a real nursery not very far from Blackpool. I can imagine various ways in which the two statements are compatible (his parents were Polish, perhaps, and settled in Lancashire after World War II). It's also possible that one of the narrators is misinformed. From what Vanessa's character says, he does seem to be the same individual as in the other films. If there is a book or similar expansion of the film, I hope to write more about the name. Samuel Robinson, for example, was the name adopted in exile by Simón Rodriguez, the tutor of Simón Bolivar. Ray Charles's name was Robinson. Rimbaud coined the verb *robinsonner*. To begin with, I assumed the name was an Anglicization, and that he came from somewhere in central or eastern Europe, then wondered, later, if he might not be from somewhere more distant, perhaps South America or the Caribbean. On the other hand, the name was suggested to me by Kafka's *Amerika*, in which the character Robinson is supposed to be Irish.

The "uneasy bickering sexual relationship" that the narrator has with Robinson in the first two films is here replaced with a relationship between the narrator of the first two films (who is Robinson's research associate) and Vanessa Redgrave's character, the narrator of *Robinson in Ruins*, who tells us she met Paul Scofield's character at a conference on documentary filmmaking in China. Given that Robinson is a former academic—whose career ended in obscure disgrace and confinement—can we be sure he would have approved of such professional globetrotting?

Some of the fictional aspects of *Robinson in Ruins* date back quite a long time, as there were several reworkings of a proposal for a third film in the series. None of these involved very much other than a description of what had happened in the increasingly long interval between the end of *Robinson in Space* and the proposed sequel, and new "problems" for exploration: environmental impoverishment and *dwelling*. In most versions, after Robinson's disappearance at the end of *Robinson in Space*, Paul's character published an account of their unfinished study and, as a result, became a government adviser. It wasn't clear whether he knew that Robinson had been shut up somewhere, or if he could have got him out. He then met Vanessa's character, who is rather wealthy, and together they founded a research organization, which eventually recovers Robinson from incarceration and puts him back to work. It did sound a little as if Paul's character might have first betrayed and then exploited his former companion. However, in the realized version of the film, I don't think much of this applies. It doesn't sound as if Vanessa's character has arranged Robinson's release from prison and it seems to be his project, not hers. In any case, although he supposedly goes shopping and carries around a camera, I'm not sure to what degree he retains, or has ever possessed, conventional materiality.

Tilda Swinton's narrator in *The Dilapidated Dwelling* also met the patron of her research ("a representative of a leading multinational chemical manufacturer") at a conference in China, but I don't think that one was about documentary film.

The revolutionary character of the British countryside is an explicit theme in *Robinson in Ruins*. We are perhaps more used to thinking of the reactionary elements of rural Britain in recent years (the pro-fox-hunting Countryside

Alliance and all the whiteness, smallness, and Toryness of much of what passes for rural politics). Can we save the British countryside?

In the short term, the rural landscape does seem to be blue, at least in England, though I imagine there are a lot of people there who aren't on the right, and don't fit the stereotypes of financial-adviser-in-a-barn-conversion etc. It does seem to be difficult to live there if you don't have, or don't want, a car. I can't imagine that the general predicament of rural settlement will change very much without something resembling radical land reform (as for example in Assynt, in the far northwest of Scotland), and while I have no idea how this might be brought about in the context of current political and economic "common sense," it seems to me that it simply isn't possible for this "common sense" to persist for very much longer. One of my hopes for the film is that it is understood to be questioning that, by making references to manufacturing and agriculture, and to episodes of resistance to enclosure since the sixteenth century, and in its lengthy encounters with nonhuman living things. During the research project of which the film is a part, an initial question about *dwelling* and "belonging" to the landscape fairly soon gave way to one which asked instead to whom the landscape and, by implication, the state effectively belong. The visible landscape is an interesting phenomenon: it's a public good, in that very many people can see it, but it isn't diminished in use—by people looking at the view—as common resources often are. Perhaps this is why people in the U.K. are so keen on landscape and imagery of landscape, because it permits us to possess something we don't possess in more tangible and constitutional ways.

Robinson's caravan is a sorry, if intriguing, indictment of the current state of housing. What role would you like to see the British countryside play in any positive future housing development?

I didn't intend to suggest that he was actually living in the caravan, merely that he left the films cans there, having "haunted" the surrounding landscape. By the end of the film, I think any corporeality he may have possessed earlier is wearing pretty thin.

I would like to think it would be possible, one day, to develop interesting domestic architecture in the rural landscape. The settlement suggested toward the end of the film is supposed to be reminiscent of proposals such as New Babylon, or those of Fourier, that would radically refashion the currently prevailing mode of living toward something more collective. However, there are two sites in the film that were among the initial proposals for "eco-towns": the disused cement quarry, where the Robinson settlement is supposed to have been established by Vanessa's character and her colleagues, and "Weston Otmoor." The cement quarry wasn't shortlisted, and Weston Otmoor was successfully resisted by nearby residents, particularly those of Weston-on-the-Green.

When nearly all new housing is designed and built by the private sector, mostly for owner occupation, and is subject to the kind of investment imperatives that characterize the U.K.'s housing market, and while alternative models of housing are outlawed or severely constrained, the prospect of rural development doesn't seem very inviting. In any case, it seems to me that the most urgent requirement for the U.K.'s housing stock is to develop feasible scenarios for its replacement, rather than merely add to the number of dwellings. The former might perhaps involve new settlements in the rural landscape, but replacement didn't seem to be the motive behind "eco-towns" or their predecessors.

***Robinson in Ruins* has a quote from Fredric Jameson near the beginning. Jameson's discussions of the "cognitive mapping" of the transformations of capitalism seem very important at the moment, as people try to untangle what the financial crisis means in relation to global patterns of production and distribution, as well as political climate that seems both vicious and uncertain. How do you go about attempting to understand the current state of the world?**

I suppose one has to try to work out what is happening, though it is very difficult to know much about the present. I grew up in the 1950s and 60s, when it looked briefly as if the U.K. might become a progressive producing economy, so I tend to concentrate on production, particularly the production of artifacts. During the most recent project I was more interested in agriculture and the implications of dependence on oil. I imagine the price of oil and its effect on the cost of shipping will eventually begin to restrict global trade. Even today, there is a tendency to perceive more global trade than actually occurs. There are, for example, a large number of disused or derelict cement factories in the U.K., so that it's easy to imagine that the U.K.'s cement industry has disappeared and that cement is now imported from lower-cost economies. It turns out, however, that as cement is a heavy, cheap commodity, it isn't worthwhile to ship it about, and about ninety percent of the cement purchased in the U.K. is produced in the U.K. The derelict factories signify worked-out quarries, not a vanished industry. One wonders why the same logic was not applicable to coal.

In *Robinson In Space*, you used a motif from Powell and Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946). In the new film there is no musical soundtrack, beyond the sounds of the countryside itself. Does nature need no soundtrack beyond the one it provides?

I was interested in the *dwelling* of birds, but I'm not a very successful ornithological cinematographer, so I recorded birdsong. The film's sound is all post-synchronized, with each location's sound recorded at or very near the camera position at the time of year at which the picture had been photo-

English pastoral
Robinson in Ruins. Courtesy of London Film Festival.

graphed. I did wonder whether to include some Marvin Gaye: "What's Going On" perhaps, or "Mercy, Mercy Me," but it didn't seem to match any of the footage, and would probably have been expensive. There is some music in the trailer: the orchestral beginning of Brahms's Alto Rhapsody, which is a setting of Goethe's "Harzreise im Winter."

What are the main features of the current "problem of England"?

I don't think the "problem" has changed much. I'm still inclined to agree with Ellen Meiksins Wood, who asked: "Is Britain, then, a peculiar capitalism, or is it peculiarly capitalist?" and argued, in opposition to [Tom] Nairn and [Perry] Anderson, that it is the latter. I'm sure that any such theory-of-everything can be challenged, but the fact remains that the U.K. has an economy dominated by the imperatives of finance and property, rather than those of production, in which various unattractive elites receive rewards that are quite unrelated to their contribution, just as in "Old Corruption." This leads to all sorts of ruinous consequences: to inequality, with all the social ills that accompany it; to the undervaluing of manufacturing and agriculture, and to the increasing "enclosure" of national assets and state activities by private owners, as at the AWE [Atomic Weapons Establishment], for example, and by companies such as Serco. Above all, it leads to an astonishing poverty of imagination—political, economic, technological, and cultural. I was very struck by the degree to which "the politics of Cockayne," as John Walter memorably characterizes Bartholomew Steer's polemic in 1596, is echoed by some of the output of the Situationist International.

NINA POWER is a *Film Quarterly* Writer-at-Large and author of *One-Dimensional Woman* (Zero Books, 2009).

CREDITS *Robinson in Ruins*. Photographer, writer, editor: Patrick Keiller. © 2010 Patrick Keiller and the Royal College of Art.

ABSTRACT An interview with Patrick Keiller, British director of essay films on the occasion of the release of *Robinson in Ruins*, the follow-up to *London* and *Robinson in Space*. Keiller discusses his engagement with history, politics, landscape, biophilia, and the mysterious character of Robinson.

KEYWORDS Patrick Keiller, *Robinson in Ruins*, essay films, *London*, *Robinson in Space*

AVANT-DOC: EIGHT INTERSECTIONS

SCOTT MACDONALD REFLECTS ON LINKS BETWEEN DOCUMENTARY AND AVANT-GARDE FILMMAKING TRADITIONS

Although they refer to broadly recognizable bodies of work, both "avant-garde film" and "documentary" have become increasingly contested terms. The logic of "avant-garde" in a cinematic context has always been questionable, since it is obvious that without the early development of commercial film, the means for producing avant-garde film would never have developed. And there are those who are suspicious of any definition of "documentary." Trinh T. Minh-ha in "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning" (in her *When the Moon Waxes Red* [Routledge, 1991]), claims: "There is no such thing as documentary—whether the term designates a category of material, a genre, an approach, or a set of techniques" (29). In the spring of 2009, I was invited to speak at a conference sponsored by the graduate students in the Department of Comparative Literature and Film at the University of Iowa, called "Avant-Doc: Intersections of Avant-Garde and Documentary Film." The focus of this conference was what seemed to be a new dimension of these two histories: the increasingly vital liminal zone between them, evidenced by the more and more frequent production of films that fit both categories or that function somewhere between them.

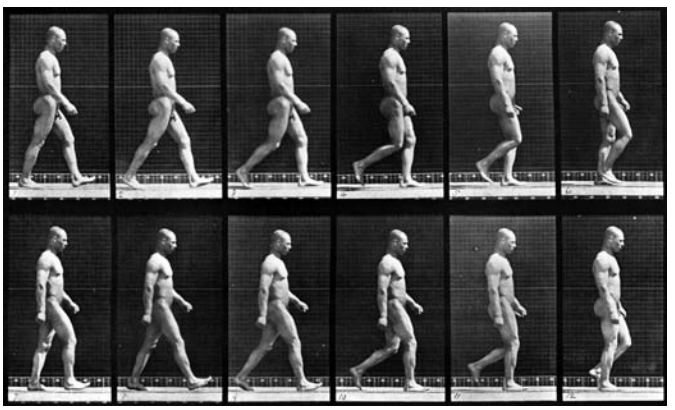
One of the advantages of the category of "avant-doc" is that it not only assists us in coming to terms with much recent work, but also allows for valuable perspectives on the ways in which these two histories have intersected over the years. To reflect upon these intersections refreshes a sense of both documentary and avant-garde filmmaking—however hard these traditions may be to define exactly—as alternative practices to commercial and narrative cinema. And at the same time it provides a useful framework for thinking about a number of new filmmaking developments.

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 50–57, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.50

EARLY EXPERIMENTS

When Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey were discovering and exploring the possibilities of photographic motion study, they were certainly the photographic avant-garde of that moment: they were discovering new possibilities for photography. And their goal was the scientific documentation of the motion of animals, birds, and human beings, presumably so that this motion could be studied more rigorously. The Muybridge and Marey serial photographs and chronophotographs contributed to technological developments that led to the improved efficiency of assembly-line industrial production and to the development of manned flight; and, at the same time, were aesthetic and technological breakthroughs that instigated, or at least predicted, new forms of artistic expression. Even the better part of a century later, American avant-garde filmmakers—Hollis Frampton and Morgan Fisher, for example—were drawn to Muybridge's serial photographs as a model for their work.

Muybridge's development of the Zoopraxiscope, his device for animating drawings of his motion-study photographs, and his use of Zoopraxiscope projections as part of his



Man Walking at Ordinary Speed
Eadweard Muybridge. Courtesy of International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House.

lectures, provided an important context for the development of Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope and, finally in 1895, the Lumière Cinématographe. Of course, at the moment when the Lumière Brothers perfected the Cinématographe and the projected motion picture, *they* became the photographic avant-garde, and like Muybridge and Marey, their primary fascination was the documentation of motion, specifically human activity, first in their own environs and then across the globe. Like Muybridge's serial photography, the Lumières' single-shot, roll-long films would have a significant impact on modern avant-garde filmmaking; a major expansion of the single-shot approach was evident in Warhol's early films and in later work by Larry Gottheim, J. J. Murphy, and many others.

CITY SYMPHONIES

The early street films of the Lumière brothers, the Edison Studio, and other producers revealed a fascination with the modern city that paved the way for films that explored city life. The short film, *Manhatta* (1921), by artists Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand intercuts between inventively composed images of lower Manhattan and title cards with poetic evocations of the city adapted from Walt Whitman poems. An early experimental landmark, *Manhatta* anticipated emergence of the feature-length "city symphony" in the late 1920s (a city symphony documents a composite day in the life of a modern metropolis). The most accomplished early city symphonies include *Rien que les heures* (1926), an exploration of Paris by Alberto Cavalcanti; Walther Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City* (1927), the film that gave the form its name; and *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) by Dziga Vertov, which combines documentary footage of several cities into a vision of post-revolutionary urban life in the Soviet Union.

Manhatta
Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand, 1921. Courtesy of Jan-Christopher Horak.

Man with a Movie Camera.
Dziga Vertov, 1929. Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art.

While documentary history has tended to focus on city symphonies as reflections of diverse political ideologies, avant-garde history has tended to see these films as crucial early instances of cinema's potential for experiment, for developing new forms, for moving beyond narrative melodrama, and for making an exploration of the cinematic apparatus the subject of film. Vertov's self-reflexive experimentation in *Man with a Movie Camera* continues to be an inspiration for avant-garde filmmakers.

The city symphony has continued to evolve over the past eighty years within both the documentary and avant-garde traditions. Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* (1986) is normally understood as a documentary, while Rudy Burckhardt's numerous film studies of New York City and Pat O'Neill's L.A. film *Water and Power* (1989) tend to be understood as contributions to avant-garde history. And the city symphony form can also sometimes be discerned in narrative cinematic

Forest of Bliss
Robert Gardner, 1986. Courtesy of Robert Gardner.

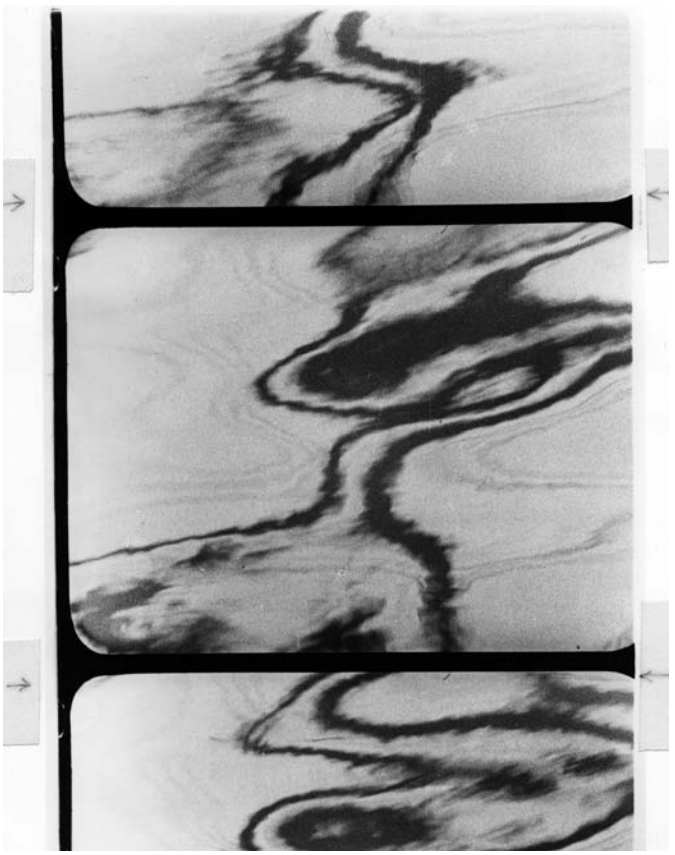
fiction. I have argued elsewhere (*Film Quarterly*, winter 1997–98) that Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) is this country's most remarkable and insightful city symphony.

FROM VISUAL POETRY TO POLITICS

By the late 1920s, the documentary impulse had generated two major approaches: the depiction of far-flung, pre-industrial cultures, as in Robert J. Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) and Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (1925); and the city symphony. Meanwhile, in Germany and France, European artists became the first film avant-garde, developing a pair of relatively distinct approaches of their own. There were Dadaist and Surrealist works, notably Man Ray's *Retour à raison* (1923), and Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali's *Un chien andalou* (1929). Other filmmakers (including Hans Richter, Walther Ruttmann, Viking Eggeling, and Oskar Fischinger) produced abstract flights of rhythm, chiaroscuro, and color, creating what came to be called "visual music." An approach distinct from any of these documentary or avant-garde approaches was evident in Ralph Steiner's H_20 (1929), Joris Ivens's *Rain* (1929), and Henwar Rodakiewicz's *Portrait of a Young Man* (1931). In these films the movie camera is used as a means of retraining perception and as a way of producing what Steiner called "a visual poetry of formal beauty."

Employing the skill with composition that he had developed as a photographer, Steiner renders his film's dry, scientific title thoroughly ironic. H_20 is a montage that begins with relatively mundane shots of water being pumped, flowing over dams, and the like, but gradually moves in the direction of visual mystery: near the end, Steiner's shots of the reflective surface of water become so abstract that viewers have trouble believing that the imagery was photographed and not generated by animation. *Rain* depicts the coming and going of a rainstorm in Amsterdam. While it is a city film, its focus is not so much on city life, as on the ways in which the storm transforms the look of the city. The longest and most under-recognized and under-appreciated of these films, *Portrait of a Young Man*, is as Rodakiewicz states in his film's first intertitle, "an endeavor to portray a certain young man in the terms of the things he likes and his manner of liking them: the sea, leaves, clouds, smoke, machinery, sunlight, the interplay of forms and rythms [*sic*], but above all—the sea." For all three of these filmmakers the movie camera was a means of showing how much more there is in our daily surround than we normally allow ourselves to notice—an idea that would be elaborated by Stan Brakhage and many other post-war avant-garde filmmakers. *Portrait of a Young Man* in particular creates an experience similar to the quiet, meditative films of Peter Hutton.

The onset of the Great Depression and the changing political climate in Europe transformed the filmmaking of all three filmmakers, moving them toward more politically oriented work. What these filmmakers were seeing around them during the early 1930s—men and women in bread lines, legions of unemployed workers—could not be ignored; and during the 1930s and 40s all three filmmakers made



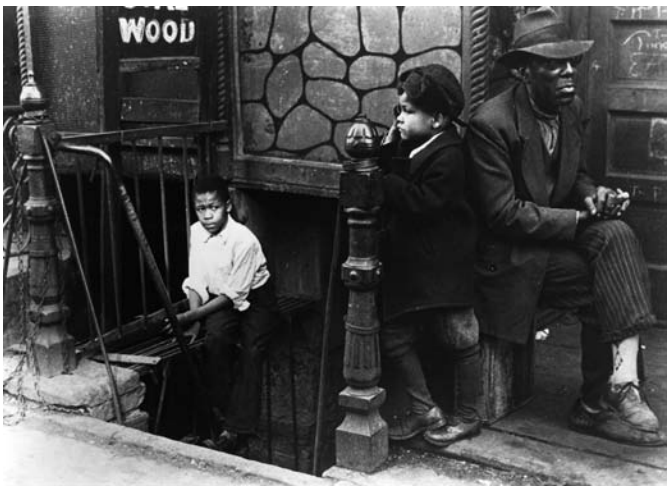
H_20
Ralph Steiner, 1929. Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art.

important contributions to canonical social documentaries. Steiner contributed cinematography to Pare Lorenz's *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936), Sidney Meyers and Jay Leyda's *People of the Cumberland* (1938), and *The City* (which he also co-directed, with Willard Van Dyke, 1939); Rodakiewicz was one of the writers for *The City*; and he directed *One Tenth of a Nation* (1940). Ivens, of course, became and remained until the 1980s a leading political documentary filmmaker.

FILM SOCIETIES

During the 1940s a crucial development for independent cinema in the United States was the emergence of a full-fledged film society movement. The leading contributors to this movement were Frank Stauffacher's Art in Cinema Film Society in San Francisco and Berkeley, founded in 1946; and Cinema 16, founded by Amos and Marcia Vogel in New York City in 1947 and programmed by Amos Vogel and Jack Goelman until 1963. Both Art and Cinema and Cinema 16 were remarkably successful. At the height of its popularity, Art in Cinema attracted audiences of 600 in both San Francisco and Berkeley; and Cinema 16 filled a 1500-seat auditorium twice a night for its monthly programs. The programming at both Art in Cinema and Cinema 16 was an inventive mixture of documentary and avant-garde film.

Stauffacher's primary commitment was to avant-garde film. The first Art in Cinema series of programs focused on the European avant-garde of the 1920s in order to contextualize Stauffacher's commitment to the support of American, and particularly Bay Area, avant-garde filmmakers. But documentary was represented during the first season by the seventh program, "Fantasy into Documentary," which included



The Quiet One
Sidney Meyers, 1948. Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art.

Song of Ceylon
Basil Wright, 1934. Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art.

Rien que les heures, *Berlin: Symphony of a Big City*, and *The City*. In subsequent years, Stauffacher's programming often included what were considered poetic documentaries: *Rain*, for example, Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon* (1934), and Sidney Meyers's *The Quiet One* (1948).

At Cinema 16 documentary and avant-garde film tended to contextualize each other within dialectically arranged programs (Vogel was a great admirer of Eisenstein's editing). Cinema 16's earliest programs pioneered the formula that would become typical of other American film societies. The inaugural program included five films: *Lamentation* (1943), a study of Martha Graham's interpretive dance; Douglas Crockwell's hand-painted abstraction, *Glens Falls Sequence* (1941); Sidney Peterson and James Broughton's Surrealist riff, *The Potted Psalm* (1946); *Monkey into Man* (1938), a documentary on ape behavior by Stuart Legg; and Phillip Stapp's political animation *Boundarylines* (1945). The second program included *The Feeling of Rejection* (1947), a psychological study of childhood emotional ties on the behavior of adults; *Five Abstract Film Exercises* (1941–44) by the Whitney Brothers; *And So They Live* (1940), a study of an Appalachian family by John Ferno; and *Hen Hop* (1945) and *Five for Four* (1945), animations by Norman McLaren made by painting and scratching directly on the filmstrip.

Vogel stood by his approach of using documentary and avant-garde film to contextualize each other, despite complaints from the Cinema 16 membership, which tended to divide between those who were excited about documentary and those whose primary interest was avant-garde experimentation. The special program of "Damned Films" presented in 1953 offered the quintessence of Vogel's dialectic of

documentary and avant-garde: after a revival of Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1931), Vogel presented Kenneth Anger's gay, psychodramatic *Fireworks* (1946) and then *The Blood of the Beasts* (*Le Sang des bêtes*, 1947), Georges Franju's beautiful and bloody documentary on Paris slaughterhouses.

SOUND OPTIONS

The development of lightweight cameras and tape recorders, more sensitive microphones, and faster film stocks during the late 1950s created additional options for filmmakers that in one sense drove documentary and avant-garde film apart and in another sense created a different kind of intersection between the two traditions. The opportunity to do sync-sound shooting gave documentary filmmakers the option of avoiding an earlier reliance on the extensive use of narration and music; and while many filmmakers continued to make films in the older mode, the option of sync-sound shooting made more experiential forms of "cinéma vérité" documentary possible. Erik Barnouw in *Documentary* (1993) describes two basic approaches: "direct cinema" (fly-on-the-wall observational filmmaking) and provocational filmmaking: films in which the process of shooting instigates interesting situations that are recorded as they unfold. The new equipment also allowed filmmakers to create forms of entertaining documentary that could compete with Hollywood and sometimes found a place on television. Drew Associates, D. A. Pennebaker, Frederick Wiseman, and the Maysles brothers were able to fashion engaging melodrama out of real life in *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (1963), *Don't Look Back* (1967), *High School* (1968), *Salesman* (1968); and Pennebaker's *Monterey Pop* (1968) instigated the rock documentary.

Many avant-garde filmmakers, however, explored non-sync alternatives or resisted the new sound technology altogether. Peter Kubelka was the crucial figure in exploring ways of working with sound other than sync. *Our Trip to Africa* (*Unsere Afrikareise*, 1966), his film about a big-game hunting safari in the Sudan, used both image and sound, but in a dialectic arrangement. Kubelka painstakingly edited the film so that the non-sync sounds we do hear in conjunction with his imagery seem both fitting and suggestive. The technique allowed Kubelka to lay bare the colonialist racism of the Austrian businessman who had organized the safari and hired him to document it, thinking the result would be a typical souvenir travel diary.

Of the filmmakers who refused sound altogether, Stan Brakhage is the best known. Committed to the idea of cinema as a *visual* art, Brakhage provided remarkable confrontations of visual taboo—*Window Water Baby Moving* (1959), *Three Films: Bluewhite, Blood's Tone, Vein* (1965), *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1972)—exploring with a handheld camera many of those aspects of the body-as-process that society (and conventional cinema) had censored, as well as many dimensions of perception that our acculturation within a consumer culture tends to erase. While Brakhage was not the first avant-garde filmmaker to commit to silent film (the 1943 silent version of *Meshes of the Afternoon* by Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid was an inspiration), he liberated a generation of filmmakers whose limited economic resources or whose interest in working with visual imagery alone caused them to abjure sound. One need only see John Marshall's cinéma-vérité Pittsburgh Police films (shot in 1970–71) and the first section of Brakhage's Pittsburgh trilogy, *Eyes* (completed in 1971), to understand the difference between sync-sound documentary and silent avant-garde treatments of the same subject—though the Brakhage films (like Kubelka's *Our Trip to Africa*) are increasingly accepted as part of documentary history.

The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes
Stan Brakhage, 1971. Courtesy of Anthology Film Archives.

David Holzman's Diary
Jim McBride, 1967. Courtesy of Direct Cinema and Mitchell Bloch.

Avant-garde film and the new sync-sound documentary also came together in Jim McBride's fiction feature *David Holzman's Diary* (1967). McBride and L. M. Kit Carson had done a good bit of research on cinéma-vérité filmmaking during the 1960s, but when they decided to critique the (implicit and sometimes explicit) claim that cinéma-vérité shooting produced films were more *real* than other forms of documentary because it allowed subjects not merely to be seen, but to be heard, their inspiration for the struggling cinéma-vérité filmmaker David Holzman was avant-garde filmmaker Andrew Noren, whose candid, personal (and silent) evocations of his daily life had become an important part of the avant-garde tradition exemplified by Brakhage.

THE FLAHERTY SEMINAR

In 1955, Francis Flaherty, Robert's widow, hosted a symposium of filmmakers to honor her husband's *oeuvre* and to promote his commitment to filmmaking "without preconceptions." Within a few years, "the Flaherty," as the symposium came to be called, was attracting dozens of filmmakers, programmers, scholars, teachers, students, and other cine-aficionados for an annual, week-long immersion in screenings of mostly new documentaries and discussions about them. By the mid-1960s, the Flaherty had become known as an event focusing solely on documentary, provoking an avant-garde guerilla action led by Jonas Mekas and Ken Jacobs. Mekas, Jacobs, and their companions decided to invade the 1963 Flaherty to present Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963) and Jacobs's own *Blonde Cobra* (1962), which they saw as a new way of cinematically representing the real. Mekas documented the event and later depicted the experience in the "FLAHERTY NEWSREEL" section of his *Lost Lost Lost* (1976): an intertitle, "REJECTED BY THE FLAHERTY SEMINAR WE SLEEP OUTSIDE IN THE COLD NIGHT OF VERMONT," introduces Mekas's voice-over narration: "While the guests proper, the respectable documentarists and cineastes slept in their warm beds, we watched the morning with the cold of night still in our bones, in our flesh. It was a Flaherty morning . . . It was very, very quiet, like in a church, and we were the monks of the Order of Cinema."

By the end of the 1960s the nearly exclusive focus of the Flaherty seminars on documentary was also being contested from within. Programmers D. Marie Grieco and Willard Van Dyke instigated a substantial presence of West Coast avant-garde filmmakers in 1968, and during the following two years Adrienne Mancia and Van Dyke maintained the new balance between documentary and avant-garde. Since then, Flaherty programming has continued to reflect a debate about the correct balance between documentary and avant-garde film. Generally speaking, documentary has remained the Flaherty's primary commitment, but presentations of avant-garde film have continued to punctuate the seminar programming. In recent decades, programmers Bruce Jenkins and Melinda Ward (the 1983 seminar), Richard Herskowitz (1987), Ruth Bradley and Kathy High (1992), Richard Herskowitz and Orlando Bagwell (1999), Ed Halter (2002), Susan Oxtoby (2004), and Irina Leimbacher (2009) have made a substantial presence of avant-garde film at the Flaherty if not quite the norm, certainly no longer unusual.

The ongoing debates about programming avant-garde film at the seminar reflect a more fundamental debate about Flaherty himself. While they are usually categorized as documentaries, Flaherty's films create experiences that are generally quite distinct from what became conventional documentary practice in the 1930s and remained standard through the 1950s. What distinguishes *Nanook of the North*, *Moana* (1926), *Man of Aran* (1934), and *Louisiana Story* (1948) is the way in which Flaherty worked with non-actors

from indigenous groups over substantial periods of time, without screenplay or script, to produce romantic evocations of particular places and times. This experimental narrative approach has as much in common with avant-garde film as with the forms of documentary that were popular during most of Flaherty's filmmaking career, and the Flaherty approach remains very much alive in films usually identified as avant-garde: Sharon Lockhart's *Pine Flat* (2006), for example, and Naomi Uman's *Unnamed Film* (2008, part 1 of her "Ukrainian Time" project).

THE PERSONAL

Avant-garde filmmakers have always found ways of exploring the personal, first by dramatizing their inner disturbances (Deren and Hammid's *Meshes of the Afternoon* and Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* are landmark instances), and later by filming the particulars of their daily lives—as Brakhage often did. So too did Mekas in *Diaries, Notes & Sketches: Walden* (1969), *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1972), and *Lost Lost Lost* (1976) among other films; Carolee Schneemann in her autobiographical trilogy: *Fuses* (1967), *Plumb Line* (1972), and *Kitch's Last Meal* (1973–78, various versions); Andrew Noren in *Huge Pupils* (1968); and Robert Huot in *Rolls: 1971* (1972) and *Third One-Year Movie* (1973). But the 1980s saw the emergence of what was essentially a different form of personal filmmaking.

Unlike earlier avant-garde filmmakers, Su Friedrich and Alan Berliner combined avant-garde and documentary techniques in order to confront their family histories. Especially notable are *The Ties that Bind* (1984) and *Sink or Swim* (1990), Friedrich's films about her relationships with her mother and her father, respectively, and *Intimate Stranger* (1991) and *Nobody's Business* (1996), Berliner's films about the maternal grandfather he never knew and his relationship with his father. These films incorporate material gathered from a variety of sources—home movies and family photographs, recycled film and television imagery, visual and auditory documents of the filmmakers' conversations with their parents, along with documentation of their own personal lives, travels, interests, and political concerns—into finished works that function as a form of therapy for some of the frustrations the filmmakers have experienced as a result of family traumas.

What has come to be called "personal documentary" was instigated in the early 1970s by Martha Coolidge's *David: Off and On* (1972), Miriam Weinstein's *Living with Peter* (1973), Amalie Rothschild's *Nana, Mom and Me* (1974), Alfred Guzzetti's *Family Portrait Sittings* (1975), and especially by Ed Pincus in his teaching and in what became his *Diaries* (filmed from 1971–76; completed in 1981). Several of Pincus's students at MIT contributed to this approach, among them Jeff Kreines (*The Plaint of Steve Kreines as Recorded by His Younger Brother Jeff*, 1974), Robb Moss (*The Tourist*, 1991), and Ross McElwee, whose *Backyard* (1984), *Sherman's March* (1986), *Time Indefinite* (1994), *The Six O'Clock News* (1996), and *Bright Leaves* (2003) are part of an ongoing saga. All these films document the experiences of the filmmakers with family members, often involving conflict with parents and siblings.

These closely related developments were occurring more or less simultaneously, though, early on, the individual makers worked generally in ignorance of each other's work and in rough concert with approaches familiar from earlier developments within the particular history they saw themselves part of. The personal avant-garde films exploit formal tactics familiar from avant-garde history. In *The Ties That Bind*, Friedrich interviews her mother by scratching her questions into the film emulsion and by allowing us only to *hear* her mother's responses. Her mother's comments are accompanied by passages of complex montage editing that subtly intersect with the film's soundtrack. Berliner punctuates *Nobody's Business* with heavily edited moments of precisely organized montage, sometimes evocative of Peter Kubelka's precision editing in *Our Trip to Africa*. The personal documentaries evoke the history of cinéma-vérité filmmaking: family relationships are represented primarily through candid, sync-sound recording of the interaction between the filmmakers and family members.

However, while Friedrich, Berliner, and McElwee have sometimes been understood, and have understood themselves, as belonging to separate traditions, their similarities are as interesting as their differences. Not only do all three filmmakers use the process of filmmaking as a way of coming to terms with family issues, but their films also have formal elements in common. For example, all three filmmakers recycle their family home movies as a means of situating present struggles within family history; and all three develop inventive first-person narrative strategies for presenting their family narratives. Finally, all three reveal how the filmmaking process itself has become an intrinsic dimension of their relationships with family members. McElwee and Berliner, in particular, struggled with their fathers' disapproval of their filmmaking careers, as is clear in *Time Indefinite* and *Nobody's Business*.

CONTEMPLATING NATURE

Strangely enough, nature film, which has long been among the most popular documentary genres, has been largely ignored by those who have chronicled documentary history.

Sweetgrass
Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, 2010. Courtesy of Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor.

In recent years, however, widespread recognition of the realities of climate change and a resurgence of interest in animal life have provided an expanded popular interest in nature filmmaking—the success of *Winged Migration* (2001), *March of the Penguins* (2005), and the recent television series *Planet Earth* (2007) are preeminent instances—and this popular interest seems to be instigating long overdue critical attention.

Some recent nature documentaries demonstrate a final intersection of documentary and avant-garde film. The Claude Nuridsany–Marie Pérennou feature, *Microcosmos* (1996), which helped to instigate the recent revival of the feature-length theatrical nature film, was the result of years of commitment to the filming of insects; their finished feature provides viewers with an opportunity to contemplate the remarkable feats of adaptation that can occur in a pastoral landscape. The recent *Ice Bears of the Beaufort* (2008) by Arthur and Jennifer Smith also required a remarkable commitment: the Smiths live in Kaktovik, a tiny town on the north coast of Alaska on the Beaufort Sea, where they film what they claim is the healthiest population of polar bears on the continent. The Smiths' commitment is driven by their concern about climate change and its potential impact on these polar bears: the film reminds us that this specific environment is an area of the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge that the Bush administration opened for oil drilling. Nuridsany–Pérennou and the Smiths can both be considered among the vanguard of documentary filmmakers dealing with issues of climate change, but their films also make use of strategies familiar from the avant-garde tradition.

While Nuridsany–Pérennou's and the Smiths' use of music and informational text (*Microcosmos* uses only two brief passages of voiceover text; *Ice Bears* uses intertitles in a manner reminiscent of *Nanook of the North*) evokes the history of documentary, both films are closely related to the tradition of meditative avant-garde film and video, exemplified by Larry Gottheim's *Horizons* (1973), Nathaniel Dorsky's *Hours for Jerome* (1982), Peter Hutton's *Skagafjörður* (2004), James Benning's *casting a glance* (2007), and Sharon Lockhart's *Double Tide* (2009). All these works ask for a new, more patient kind of audience, willing to see the experience of cinema less as a source of information than as a way of learning to be more fully present during gradual revelations of the particulars of the natural environment and human engagement with it. Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor's recent documentary *Sweetgrass* (2009), a video focused on sheepherding in the Montana mountains, fits comfortably within the traditional history of documentary. Indeed, according to Barbash, the title is a reference to Cooper and Schoedsack's *Grass*. Like *Microcosmos* and *Ice Bears of the Beaufort*, however, and like the avant-garde films mentioned above, *Sweetgrass* is also a contemplation of a particular natural environment as it is revealed over time.

⁂

The idea of "avant-doc" suggests that what, in earlier decades, may have seemed a set of intermittent and unrelated crossovers within the relatively distinct histories of documentary and avant-garde film can be understood as an evolving tradition. In particular, the proliferating combination of social and environmental anxieties during recent years seems to have energized an increasingly widespread desire on the part of filmmakers to combine cinema's ability to engage serious political issues (long considered a focus of documentary) with its capacity for retraining perception and providing experiences akin to meditation (generally identified with avant-garde film). As scholars and critics respond to this development and situate it historically, it is likely that the two filmmaking traditions will increasingly be seen as affiliated rather than antagonistic, which is surely a development to be welcomed.

SCOTT MACDONALD is author of *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*, now in five volumes from University of California Press, which also published his *The Garden in the Machine* (2001), *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor* (2008), and *Adventures of Perception: Cinema As Exploration* (2009).

ABSTRACT An overview of the interlinking aesthetic and institutional histories of avant-garde and documentary film in terms of: early experiments; city symphonies; visual poetry and politics; film societies; sound options; the Flaherty Seminar; the personal; contemplating nature.

KEYWORDS documentary film, avant-garde film, city symphonies, film sound, nature film

VISIONARY TELEVISION: *WORLD ON A WIRE* AND *ARTEMIS 81*

MARK FISHER REVISITS TELEVISION DRAMAS FROM RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER AND DAVID RUDKIN

World on a Wire (*Welt am Dracht*) was a two-part production made for the Westdeutscher Rundfunk public service channel in 1973; *Artemis 81* was a three-hour television film broadcast by the BBC in 1981. Both were the work of auteurs: *World on a Wire* was an adaptation of Daniel F. Galouye's 1964 science-fiction novel *Simulacron-3* by none other than Rainer Werner Fassbinder, while *Artemis 81* was the work of lesser-known but equally visionary dramatist David Rudkin.

The two productions are genre works of an aberrant and deeply ambitious type. This was a time—before the arrival of blockbuster budgets and digital technology raised the wrong kind of expectations—when high-concept science fiction could be confidently produced by public service broadcasters. These shows made a virtue of the logistical and budgetary constraints they were under. Instead of the frictionless, massively labour-intensive non-places of CGI, *World on a Wire* and *Artemis 81* make extraordinary use of "found locations." Fassbinder repeated the trick that Godard had pulled with *Alphaville*, constructing a future city by editing together Parisian modernist architecture, construction sites, and shopping malls. *Artemis 81*, meanwhile, concocted a dystopian landscape from such places as Harwich ferry terminal, an under-construction power station in North Wales, and the Anglican cathedral in Liverpool.

Both these productions are deeply concerned with problems of vision and spectatorship. Rudkin, whose BFI Film Classics book on Dreyer's *Vampyr* consummately establishes how finely tuned his cineaste's eye is, packed *Artemis 81* with cinematic references—to Dreyer himself, Bergman, Hammer horror, and Hitchcock. And the film is about learning how to see—a feat which the lead character, the pulp horror writer Gideon Harlax, only manages to achieve once he discards the outsized spectacles that he wears in the first part of the film, one of many glassy shields that he hides behind in the initial phases of the drama. In *World on a Wire*, meanwhile, the background figures in crowd scenes have a curiously agog immobility, as if they are spectators at a stage play. One early scene is like an extrapolation from a Bryan Ferry album sleeve of the early 1970s: in an atmosphere of louche decadence, members of the business and cultural elite linger like models or gawp like voyeurs as they stand around a swimming pool, its reflected light playing on the then-futuristic interiors. There is barely a scene that doesn't feature a reflective surface, and some of the most memorable shots show reflections of reflections, infinite regresses of simulacra. One of the opening scenes centers on a mirror: a small hand-mirror that the obviously disturbed head of the Simulacron project, Professor Vollmer, frantically waves in the face of his colleagues, saying, "You are only the image that others have of you." The project has created a computer-generated world, populated by "identity units" who believe themselves to be real people. Vollmer dies, and is replaced by the programmer Stiller, who soon becomes obsessed with the enigma that drove Vollmer into madness.

The concern with vision and reflection connects to the science-fiction idea that the world may not be what it seems. In his review of *World on a Wire* for *Slant* magazine (www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/world-on-a-wire/4765), however, Simon Abrams argues that we should resist the temptation to see Fassbinder's production as a "revolutionary, unsung sci-fi epic about virtual reality and/or megalomania." *World on a Wire* might have been made twenty-six years before *The Matrix* (1999), as the text on the DVD box trumpets, but—as Abrams points out—it was broadcast several years after Philip K. Dick's groundbreaking explorations of simulation in stories such as "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" (1966) and "The Electric Ant" (1969). This may be the case, but what makes *World on a Wire* interesting is the way that it very much belongs to its own time. Abrams complains of Fassbinder's diffidence in respect of science-fiction tropes, yet, rather like Tarkovsky's take on SF in *Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker*

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 58–63, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.58

(1979), it is Fassbinder's deviation from certain generic conventions that gives *World on a Wire* a particular charge—especially in the wake of *Star Wars* (1977) and *The Matrix*. While both those films are defined by their special effects, there are no visual effects to speak of in *World on a Wire*. The most conspicuous "effect" is the startling Radiophonic Workshop-like squiggles and spurts of electronic music, which break into Fassbinder's stylized naturalism like a crack in reality itself.

In his *Postmodernist Fiction* (Routledge, 1987), the literary theorist Brian McHale makes a distinction between fictions organized around epistemological problems—what can I know about this world?—and those oriented toward ontological problems—what status does this world have? McHale treats Dick's fiction, and that of Thomas Pynchon and Jorge Luis Borges, as typical of the ontological turn, and *World on a Wire* clearly belongs to this mode too. McHale draws upon Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (1979), and its concept of a "strange loop." A strange loop occurs when an ontological hierarchy is set up—worlds are nested within worlds—but then disrupted. What should be at an ontologically "inferior" level suddenly appears one level up (a fictional character interacts with its author, say); or what should be at an ontologically "superior" level appears one level down (an author finds himself in the fictional world he thought he was creating). Escher's images—not for nothing referenced in Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010)—exemplify the paradoxical spaces of the strange loop.

In *World on a Wire*, the strange loop is created by Einstein, the identity unit in Simulacron that those in the Institute for Cybernetics and Future Science use to communicate directly with in the simulated world. In order to perform this liaising function, Einstein naturally has to be aware that he is a simulation. But this knowledge inevitably produces the desire to climb up to the "real" world—a desire, it is implied, that can never be satisfied. One of the enigmas that Vollmer leaves behind is a sketch alluding to Zeno's paradoxes—and I couldn't help but be reminded here of Slavoj Žižek's remarks on Zeno in *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (MIT Press, 1992). For Žižek, the paradoxical idea that desired objects must remain at a constant distance away from the subject, never getting closer, is crucial in the psychoanalytic theory of the drive: "the drive's ultimate aim is simply to reproduce itself as drive, to return to its circular path . . . The real source of enjoyment is the repetitive nature of this closed circuit" (5).

The ontological terror on which *World on a Wire* turns—is our own world a simulation?—is now very familiar, via the many Dick adaptations and their imitators. But, despite not actually being an adaptation of a Dick fiction, *World on a Wire* has more in common with the wry mordancy of Dick's work than many official Dick adaptations, not least in the way that it shows each of its three nested worlds as being equally drab. We actually see very little of the world "below" (the world inside the Simulacron) and almost nothing of the world "above" (the world one level up from what we first took to be reality). The world below we see only in snatched glimpses of hotel lobbies and inside a lorry driver's cab. But it is the revelation—or non-revelation—of the world above at the climax of the film that is most startling. Instead of some Gnostic transfiguration, we find ourselves in what looks like a meeting room in some ultra-banal office block. At first, the electronic blinds are down, momentarily holding open the possibility that there will be some marvelous—or at least strange—world to be seen once they are up. But when they do eventually rise, we see only the same grey skies and cityscape. Stiller—whose name now assumes a special significance—has attained his official goal (climbing up to the "world above"), but he has not "moved." The Zenonian condition remains, in the form of an ontological anxiety that—in a pre-echo of the torment that destroys Mal in *Inception*—is as insatiable as drive: once Stiller's faith in his initial lifeworld is shattered, there is no possibility of fully believing in any reality. Like the object posited by the psychoanalytic drive, the "real world" forever remains tantalizingly out of reach.

The differences between the three worlds is not accessible at the level of experience (of either the characters or the audience), and it is as if Fassbinder, rather than being bored by science-fiction themes, produces in *World on a Wire* something that perfectly fits Darko Suvin's definition in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (Yale University Press, 1979) of the genre as the art of "cognitive estrangement." Stiller's mounting awareness of the simulated nature of the world that everyone around him takes for reality forces a cognitive estrangement so intense that it constitutes a psychotic break. The content of his experience is the same in every respect; but, because everything he senses is now *cognitively* reclassified as a simulation, he is no longer able to live.

Platonism meets materialism here. At one point, Stiller berates his bemused colleagues with the Platonic concept that they are not drinking a cup of coffee, but "the idea of a cup of coffee." As the ending of *World on a Wire* confirms, there's no difference—or at least no difference one can experience—between being, as Stiller puts it, "a few electronic circuits" and having a physical body. In both cases, consciousness—and all the supposed richness of what phenomenologically orientated philosophers call "qualia," the texture of our sensual experience—turns out to be dependent upon hardware, whether biological or cybernetic.

A nest of worlds and images

World on a Wire. © 1973 WDR/2010 Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation. DVD: Second Sight (U.K.).

World on a Wire exists in broadly the same moment as Jean Baudrillard's reflections on simulation in his 1976 book *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. There, Baudrillard distinguishes between three "orders of simulation"—the first, mechanical copies of objects in the world; the second, the artifacts of industrial mass production; the third, the feedback systems of cybernetics. For Baudrillard, the opinion poll constitutes a special example of this "third order of simulacra," since such polls do not neutrally reflect the world but actively intervene in it—or rather, they make the question of whether they affect the world or not unanswerable. They form a strange loop. It's therefore fitting that *World on a Wire*'s Simulacron is a market-research experiment of sorts; or, at least, that's what it partly becomes. Simulacron is officially a state initiative, and the endearingly quaint anxieties about the encroachment of corporate interests into the project that constitutes *World on a Wire*'s major subplot place it very much in the West Germany of the 1970s. In the documentary *Fassbinder's "World on a Wire": Looking Ahead to Today*, it is noted that one of the advantages of shooting in Paris was that the city already had shopping malls, a development that had not yet made its way to West Germany. Dick's fiction came out of an American context where it was assumed that commerce would absorb everything, and when simulation technology re-emerges in the Dick-influenced cyberpunk cinema of *Blade Runner* (1982), *Videodrome* (1983), and *Total Recall* (1990), it is as a commercial application, controlled and developed by corporations. Fredric Jameson argues in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Indiana University Press, 1992) that the corporate takeover of this technology is an important narrative in a film like *Videodrome*, one of whose preoccupations, he argues, is "the tendential international monopolization of the media and the various local culture industries" (26).

This naturally brings us to the question of the institutions which funded and broadcast *World on a Wire* and *Artemis 81*—Westdeutscher Rundfunk in West Germany and the BBC. Although it is still notionally a state-funded public service broadcaster, the BBC has long since succumbed to a populism which has acted in concert with business values and practices to create conditions in which the broadcast of a film like *Artemis 81* is now unimaginable. The three-hour film felt challenging at the time, but in retrospect its commissioning and broadcast is even more astonishing.

Artemis 81 feels like it belongs to a Britain that was European in a way that the country never quite was. That's partly because the production was originally intended to be a co-production with Danish television, so that Rudkin built Danish themes and locations into the plot. These remained, even after the collaboration with the Danes collapsed. But the Scandinavian motifs are more than a matter of logistics and instrumentality. They reflect something in Rudkin's sensibility—his passion for Dreyer and Bergman and for "the dark, cold, bleak legends of the North," as Michael Moorcock memorably described the Scandinavian myths in *The Final Programme* (1973). Rudkin's Scandinavia—positioned by *Artemis 81* as Britain's dark North European twin—was, unapologetically, a fantasmatic space: a Scandinavia of the mind, like Hamlet's Elsinore, one of the many intertextual references that Rudkin embeds into the script. But to say it is fantasmatic and mythic is not to say that it is false: Rudkin's intuition, deeply antithetical to the prevailing empiricist ideas in Britain, was that it is workaday mundanity, the world of idle chat and trivial curiosity, which is the most pernicious realm of delusion, trapping us in the worst versions of ourselves. This was the message of Rudkin's best-known work for television, *Penda's Fen*, originally broadcast in 1973 as part of the BBC's *Play for Today* series, and directed by Alan Clarke. "The vision of Albion in *Penda's Fen*," Rob Young writes in his *Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music* (Faber and Faber, 2010), "ends far from the comfortable Middle England complacency of its beginning: the country is embraced, by its oldest pagan spirit as well as by its younger radicals, as a chaotic, revolutionary, mongrel nation. The pattern under the plough, the occult history of Albion—the British Dreamtime—lies waiting to be discovered by anyone with the right mental equipment" (416–17).

This idea that an alternative, oneiric national imaginary is accessible to "anyone with the right mental equipment" means that Rudkin cannot be positioned as the kind of elitist snob from which neoliberal populism has claimed to liberate us. Rudkin's work in *Artemis 81* was in fact the exact opposite of snobbery. It is the expensively educated agents of neoliberalism who have disdain for the mass audience, arguing that "ordinary people" do not want the kind of challenging drama that Rudkin wrote. Now, in the much-vaunted era of "choice," those "ordinary people" have no chance to experience this kind of challenging and visionary work on television. The potency of a production like *Artemis 81* was intensified by the fact that it was broadcast at a time when Britain only had three television channels. People found themselves entranced and baffled by something that they would not have "chosen" to watch but which absorbed them when they stumbled upon it.

Genuine experimentalism has to risk failure, and *Artemis 81*'s ambition was without doubt overreaching. Writing about *Artemis 81* on his own website (www.davidrudkin.com/html/tv/artemis.html), Rudkin is well aware of this: "I can see why

Allusion and nightmare

Artemis 81. © 1981 BBC/2007 BBC Worldwide Ltd. MCPS. DVD: BBC/2 Entertain Video (U.K.)

some disparage it now as a 'pretensh-fest' by a 'hi-aim author' (okay folks, let's all be happy little epsilons and aim low . . .); but where people positively respond to it, it's to its prodigality with images, and its mythic charge that flows into parts of us that meaner contemporary tv drama (and cinema for that matter) do not even know are there." Rudkin goes on to "acknowledge that the piece is uneven—in the writing and in the realizing." Yet the sprawling unevenness, the failure of all the pieces to properly add up, reinforce the genuinely oneiric quality of the film. It is a modern myth that has the consistency—and inconsistency—of a dream (and its dream sequences are, in my view, some of the most powerful on film).

Rudkin himself summarizes *Artemis 81* with a brisk economy: it was, he writes on his website, an "existential morality, told in terms of Gothic fable, with powerful organ music . . . and Hitchcockian allusions." Harlax is drawn into an enigma concerning the famous Danish organist, Albrecht von Drachenfels (Dan O'Herlihy) and a statuette of the goddess Magog. Fragments of the statuette are somehow connected with a number of suicides. Harlax coldly pursues the mystery with an emotional detachment that seems almost autistic, openly treating the families of those who have died as research material. Rather than elucidating anything, Harlax's research instead opens up a densely tangled myth-space: not so much a British Dreamtime as a Nordic Nightmare. Harlax's detachment is shattered when he suddenly feels anxiety for his lover Gwen (Dinah Stabb) and a bomb destroys his motor home. By this point, it is not clear if the explosion "really" happens, or if it is a symbol of the cracking of Harlax's solipsism. What is certain is that we are now definitively in an expressionist terrain, where the boundaries between the unconscious, myth, and the external world are no longer secure. Harlax is literally pulled out of his familiar life (or what is left of it) when he is rescued by the angel Helith (Sting), who is struggling against his brother Asrael (Roland Curram), the angel of death.

The existentialism that Rudkin refers to comes from Heidegger. In the extremely informative DVD commentary, Rudkin points out that, on set, the nightmare city into which Harlax is plunged after his lifeworld has fallen apart was given the name Geworfenheit, a reference to Heidegger's concept of "thrownness"—the idea that we are pitched into the midst of the world before we can reflect on it or make sense of it. Geworfenheit is a fogbound miltarized zone where consumptives expectorate blood into their scarves. Announcements made in what sound like an Eastern European language are continually pumped into the acrid air from a public address system. Laughing children who might well have run off the set of Welles's *The Trial* (1962) caper around, seemingly with malignant intentions. This astonishing sequence anticipates both the polyglot city of *Blade Runner* and the authoritarian dystopia of *Children of Men* (2006). Just like Stephen in *Penda's Fen*, Harlax can only attain a visionary state after his identity has been (painfully) dismantled. Harlax's experience of thrownness is, of course, doubled by that of the audience. We, too, are perplexed, stripped of much of what we expect to find in television drama.

Rudkin says on his website that he thought "that some of the playing lacks inwardness—in a very tight shoot, technical and budget considerations predominated, thus the director had little time to do the deeper exploring with the actors that is necessary, so that they were working mainly on technique." But, again, this apparent deficiency only adds to *Artemis 81*'s weird power. The characters seem as remote and forbidding as the expressionistic landscapes through which they move. There is none of the emotional grammar which a viewer of today's television takes for granted. The characters don't cry out to be related to. They speak cryptically and elliptically, or else they declaim like Brechtian ciphers. The emotions may not be cheap or heavily telegraphed, but *Artemis 81* is very moving at points, nowhere more so than when Harlax is abandoned by Helith in the nightmare city. On the DVD commentary, Rudkin says that this incident was inspired by an occasion when, as a child, he became separated from his mother. Rudkin's method is exemplified in the way that he uses this incident: not reducing myth and symbol to their supposed "roots" in Oedipal familialism, but transforming a personal ordeal into a multivalent meditation on existential destitution.

Artemis 81 is as far from high modernism as it is from postmodern populism. It is a work of pulp modernism, which uses the pulp form of science fiction for the highest artistic purposes. Hitchcock—who wed European surrealism and psychoanalysis to the American thriller form—was a precursor (a nod to the De Chirico-like ship at the end of a street in 1964's *Marnie* is one of many Hitchcock references). But

Looking-glass fiction
Artemis 81. © 1981 BBC/2007 BBC Worldwide Ltd. MCPS.
DVD: BBC/2 Entertain Video (U.K.)

Vertigo (1958) is the main Hitchcock intertext in a film, one of whose repeated concepts is *learning to fall*. To fall is to lose one's footing (one's grounding in a familiar world) and one's standing (one's status). One particular harrowing scene, a very Hitchcockian combination of surrealism, sex, and sadism, sees Harlax clinging onto a hanging woman inside a swinging cathedral bell. "It's better to fall than to hang," Harlax tells her, a lesson that he has learned from being divested of his former certainties. Rudkin's message, in *Artemis 81* as in *Penda's Fen* before it, is that there is a vertiginous enjoyment to be had from allowing oneself to fall into the unknown.

Artemis 81 now feels like a requiem for those lost cultural spaces where experimentalism could commingle with the popular, where high art could blend into public service functionalism (on the DVD commentary, Rudkin reminds us that Dreyer once made a public information film cautioning about the dangers of speeding). The question that both *Artemis 81* and *World on a Wire* raise is: can we imagine seeing drama this demanding, this strange on television ever again?

MARK FISHER is the author of *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Zero Books, 2009). He blogs at k-punk.abstractdynamics.org.

DVD DATA *Artemis 81*. Director: Alastair Reid, 1981. Writer: David Rudkin. © 1981 BBC/2007 BBC Worldwide Ltd MCPS. Publisher: BBC/2 Entertain. £15.99, 1 disc.

World on a Wire [*Welt am Dracht*]. Director: Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1973. © Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation. Publisher: Second Sight Films. £19.99, 2 discs.

ABSTRACT A review of two radical works of television science fiction: *World on a Wire* (1973), Rainer Werner Fassbinder's bleak exploration of reality and technological simulation, which is comparable to the fiction of Philip K. Dick; and *Artemis 81* (1981), dramatist David Rudkin's eerie, expressionist Heideggerian fantasy.

KEYWORDS Fassbinder, Rudkin, *World on a Wire*, *Artemis 81*, science fiction

AMNESIAS OF MURDER: *MOTHER*

From Bong Joon-ho, the director of *Memories of Murder*, with its fluctuating mix of police procedural and social satire, comes another dismantling of the whodunit plot. Where that 2003 film tracks a real-life, still-unsolved South Korean rape and murder spree from the politically repressive period of the early 1980s, by contrast the sequential killing in the contemporary setting of *Mother* (2009), fictional this time, yields more discovered perpetrators than we expect. Yet the film's topic is the *forgetting* of violence in a nested pattern of psychic elision and refused responsibility. So that it, too, indirectly responds to the troubled arc of Korean history; a military dictatorship, once collectively justified during the Cold War as a defense against communism, is put as far from mind as possible. None of this deliberate forgetting is explicit in the film. Still, international genre formats are crossed with the preoccupations of a national cinema when past collides with present over the double figure of the Mother as an embodiment of continuity along both generational and gender lines.

All is a puzzle at the start. Credits appear on a black screen to the sound of spare guitar thrums, the hum of insects, the faint chirp of birds. As the background score goes silent, a panoramic image opens up, whose natural expanse is soon encroached upon by a more unlikely music. A well-dressed older woman wanders forward across a field of ripe wheat, an odd pastoral tableau turning even stranger when she lifts her hands and begins to dance—swaying, out of sync, to a lush Latin melody dialed up out of nowhere. Not just her rhythm, but the scene's whole tone seems weird, mysterious, askew. Only later do we recognize her dance as a self-willed flight from the unthinkable. We have begun *in medias res*, but only, we find, in the middle of things that haven't happened yet. It will take time, plot time, to refigure this opening matrix as it intrudes from the future upon standard narrative chronology. But already a disjunctive mood is established that will later swerve between extremes of ferocity and farce—and do so at a new level of intensity in that blend of political edge and cinephile energy that marks Bong's central place in the New Korean Cinema.

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 64–68, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.64

The plot takes its first lurch into violence, minor and accidental, when we cut, by visual pun, from that vast expanse of wheat to the literal *slicing* of a single sheaf of dry stalks. The busy hands are those of that older woman, now kneeling in her workplace and about to bloody her finger when she looks up in panic at her son in danger across a busy street. Her blood is soon spilled on him—and comically mistaken for his own—when she rushes to his side after he is hit by a speeding car. Already marking a protective blood relationship too close for comfort, the scene focuses the noise and commotion of small-town life on the anxieties of a class society where the rich run roughshod over the laboring poor—here a hit-and-run driver barreling in his Mercedes with high-placed friends (businessmen and a university dean) to an afternoon at the country club. When the mother's twenty-something son Do-joon (who, we soon realize, is mentally challenged) and a street-smart buddy try rising up against this abusive power in a comic episode of blundering revenge at the golf course, the genre horizons are set: violence, reprisal, peremptory arrests, male assertiveness both excused and punished—and all served up with a seriocomic air and flair. This odd comedy will grow increasingly diagnostic in its play of discrepancies, its isolated human quirks; as the price of no communism, there is little community left—society so atomized, and families so far from nuclear, that self-interest has become almost animal in its instincts.

Erupting from this context, the violence soon veers from the grotesque to the tragic, where it is only public outrage that can bring the locals together. A high-school girl is found with her skull crushed, and the plot turns into a murder mystery, part of whose solution has been there already, though unrecognizable, in the enigmatic prologue—to which the film must arrange our return after the presumed wrong-man plot undergoes a trick reversal. He was the right man after all, and his sympathetic champion, the Mother, even guiltier. After taking the blame for a minor vandalism against the Mercedes which he forgot he hadn't even committed, Do-joon is arraigned under police duress—by genre convention, more innocent victimhood (we are set up to think)—on this heinous murder charge. Having been pressured to confess, he undergoes further abuse in jail. When called a

"retard," he follows his mother's lifelong advice always to defend himself and ends up beaten and bruised.

And this present assault shakes loose the latent trace of another and worse violence, for only now does Do-joon remember—as marked by a gigantic eye-opened closeup behind prison glass—that his poor and single mother, the unlicensed acupuncturist, had once tried to kill him, him *and* herself, with rat poison. Whether that poison is responsible for his subsequent mental condition, or whether instead the mother's desperate measure was attempted in anguish over the burdens of just that disability to begin with, nothing definite is said. Cause and effect refuse to read each other in such a direct way. Nonetheless, from her wailing rage when confronted with this memory, it would seem that the mother's own repression of the incident, as well as her son's, has returned with a vengeance. In any case, his tragedy (rather than his malady, congenital or not) is an inherited one, his deprivations economic as well as mental.

Despite Do-joon's sentencing, Mother's hunt for the murderer continues until she tracks down the elderly junkyard keeper she has come to suspect. Yet he, to her horror, has instead seen her son do the deed—petulantly heaving a large stone at the pretty schoolgirl who (Do-joon's nurtured self-defense at work again) has mocked his clumsy lust. The old man's flashback soon reveals for the viewer how the son immediately blocked this violence from his befuddled, drunken mind, kneading his temples—his mother's suggested remedy for clearing his head—as if in this case trying to rub his mind clean of the crime. Though his motives remain unclear and perhaps unconscious, when Do-joon continues to keep his guilt at bay, or at least hold his tongue about it, one guesses that the other maternal lesson, the stance of self-protectiveness, has also been deeply internalized.

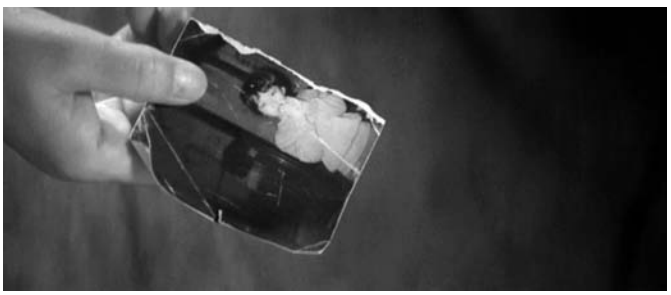
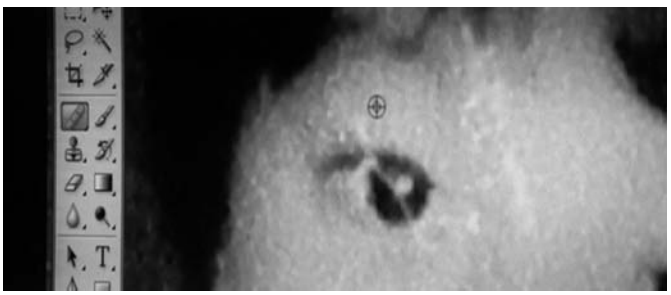
As far as Mother is concerned, the threat is above all that someone *else* remembers him as the culprit. In her cornered, maddened devotion, she now repeats the homicidal violence by bludgeoning to death that elderly male witness, the junk dealer, she has pretended to befriend as a social worker. In striving to make a man of the son she long ago failed to kill, and has guiltily brought up alive, she has turned them both into defensive murderers, lashing out from the midst of their social impotence. Empathy is frozen by hardship, her private moral compass surrendered to those external conditions whose arbitrary and cruel force both characters end up replicating.

On her knees in her victim's hovel, Mother vainly attempts to mop up the pool of blood spreading across the dirt floor, just as, early on, she had tried to kick dirt over the spot where her son had pissed at a bus stop. But a more effective "cover-up" is needed, and she burns the place down instead, including all evidence of her mayhem. The good witch with her needles has become a scourging demon. Yet by a narrative coincidence strained to the point of almost parodic fate, the son, on the way home from prison, falsely exonerated, happens to find her singed acupuncture box at the arson scene. But how *savant* has this battered village idiot become? True to the ongoing pendulum swings of innocence, ignorance, and denial that render Do-joon's motivation ambiguous throughout, it is unclear, when he hands the tin to her near the end, whether he has guessed the consequences of his discovery. Enough for Mother that he might have. A nervous wreck, she staggers aboard the cartoonish "Thank you, Mother" bus tour to which he is treating her. By this point the harrowing melodrama of violence and its generational backlash has come unabashedly close to black comedy, its last tragic irony a sick joke.

Yet nothing can mitigate its final sting. The gathering ironies of plot can't be written off as just another slick "switch" in the global thriller mode, the detective figure exposed as schizophrenic killer, as in films from *Identity* (James Mangold, 2000) to *Shutter Island* (Martin Scorsese, 2009). In *Mother* the sequence of narrative twists—two sympathetic protagonists each in turn revealed as killers—operates more like a double helix, rotating back on itself to tighten the logic, sociological as well as psychological, by which victims become perpetrators. An intended poisoning, though actually aborted, has come back from its buried shame to haunt the present not just in the form of successive homicides but as the emblem of polluted morality within a toxic social surround.

Hence *Mother*'s triangulation with the last two of Bong Joon-ho's films. The biggest commercial hit in the history of Korean cinema, *The Host* (2006) was in its own right a fable of poisoned national lineage, a darkly comic sci-fi allegory about the noxious U.S. legacy in South Korea, in the prologue to which an American officer orders the emptying of gallons of formaldehyde from the military morgue into the Han River over the protest of his younger Korean subordinate. What results is an update of the atomic mutation plot in Japanese monster parables from *Godzilla* on; here it is a giant amphibious carnivore holding hostage an entire generation in the symbolic person of one family's young daughter, caged in the sewer for later devouring. The corruption of authority is entirely homebred and realistic in the earlier *Memories of Murder*, which begins with a sexually demeaning police interrogation almost identical to that of the son

TRAUMAS RETURN

Mother. © 2009 CJ Entertainment Inc./Barunson Co. Ltd. DVD: Magnolia Home Entertainment.

in *Mother*. Stripped to his underpants, a mentally disabled boy, disfigured as well, is coerced into an admission of sexual murder. Eventually the police catch on: he is, like so many of his damaged generation, an eyewitness to savagery rather than the perpetrator. But when he is finally shown the photo of the main suspect in the ongoing crimes, his mind snaps; he reverts instead to memories of a previous violence, seeing only the man who had thrown him into a fire and scarred his face. As in *Mother*, each trauma is the replay, the scarring memory, of another; each layer of innocence veiling a deeper crime; and each mentally defective victim suggesting retarded development on a broader national scale.

When *Mother* revisits this logic of displaced violence from the previous serial rape plot, the brutalization of youth is again at issue. In both films, paternal authority is worthless even when not downright abusive, with absent fathers replaced by belligerent law enforcers, themselves stand-ins for a repressive state. Projected in this way is that crisis of masculinity so often diagnosed in the New Korean cinema: a crisis almost travestied in *Mother* when the possessive parent takes it upon herself to add virility herbs to the meals of the adult son who still shares her bed—as well as encouraging his assertions of self-esteem at any cost. (The double mandate, sexual and social: stand up like a man.) But an allied sort of gender breakdown is also explicit in *Mother*, with a dysfunctional matriarchy as much to blame as the array of predatory or feckless men. The murdered schoolgirl, we come to discover, has been selling her body, sometimes only for rice, often to men old enough to be her father, even grandfather, and less to feed that body than to appease the demands of her drunken grandmother for rice wine. The one male elder in the underclass world of *Mother* is the childless junk dealer—custodian of a whole era's trashed history—who has also been trading for the teen girl's favors before Mother crushes the remaining life out of him.

Yielding up a false clue in this abuse-and-murder plot, a contemporary high-tech slant operates at an oblique angle to those traditional techniques of the mother's acupuncture that figure the failed remedies of the past in addressing pressing social anxieties. The murdered girl is discovered to have adroitly revamped her mobile phone into a "pervert phone," disarming the digital shutter click so that the men who rent her won't be able to hear the noise of their visual capture. This archive of potential revenge and blackmail falls instead, posthumously, into Mother's investigative net, so that she eventually murders the grizzled man identified from these images, by Do-joon, as lurking at the scene of the crime on the night of the murder: an identification that involves, by shot/reverse shot, the digital image held out of focus between mother and son across their reciprocal specters of complicity in the mirroring prison glass. That's the plot contrivance. But the rewired phone is linked as well to a more loaded irony. At the same all-purpose photo shop where, in the owner's flashback, we see the schoolgirl wondering about getting her incriminating digital files printed off one day, narration has buckled tight another of the film's disjunctive editing loops. Mother looks on at the digital retouching of an old and creased photo of her young son taken around the time she tried to euthanize him—and retrieved from the attic just after a present-tense bout of nausea has recalled for her, in the film's most deeply dredged flashback, his innocent stare as she handed him the poison. The mangled past is now brought back to virtually rectified life by Photoshop.

The past cannot be so easily doctored, though, in the shot to which plot finally returns us with that opening pastoral vista—the aftermath (we now recognize) of murderous frenzy in her flight from the torched junkyard across that prefigured field of wheat. The delayed fuse of the prologue now detonates its explanation in two stages. What seemed an odd outburst of rhythmic motion at the start is retroactively made clear as the hallucination of escape. The release into dance, the woman's body freed from the psychic weight of the blows it has just delivered, alleviated by a different beat, results from a dissociation whose cause is soon to be disclosed as a last palliative gesture on Mother's part. By now, we understand why, in fear of being pursued, she has looked back in crossing the field, back at the violence she always leaves in her wake. And this time, in real time, instead of raising her hands above her head, she stares at her blood-streaked palms in a prolonged point-of-view shot. From which the editing slices away for a second time to those same hands at their shearing work back in town. Without her actually sowing or reaping, still the harvest of violence is of her own gleaning. And the herbs, as her female boss has complained after sampling them at one point, are bitter.

When Mother again glances up from blade to camera, just as she had at the opening of the narrative, what we see in reverse shot is not her boy in trouble but instead an approaching detective—come not to arrest her, as she obviously suspects, but to announce the son's release from jail. A yet more mentally disabled boy has been charged instead. With that scapegoat in place, two generations are freed of official suspicion at once. With no fair punishment to be administered by state authority, all justice must now be strictly poetic. On the bus ride at the end, with the other maternal

Mother. © 2009 CJ Entertainment Inc./Barunson Co. Ltd. DVD: Magnolia Home Entertainment.

honorees bouncing in the aisle to recorded disco, one Mother sits alone, sunk in a despair that submerges the pop racket in a subjective orchestral score. Out come the acupuncture needles just returned to her by Do-joon in tacit accusation, the longest one now deftly applied to her inner thigh, where, as she earlier explained, one's worst memories can be relieved. Her witchery is finally turned upon herself as temporary exorcism. Having stabbed to the core of her pain, she can now throw herself into the collective revelry. Yet she is dancing not to the group tune but suddenly, as it emerges from the orchestral background, to the languorous melody from the prologue, in its more sensuous, dreamy tempo—a narcotic pulse outside of narrative time altogether.

The somatic-emotive link of her acupuncture has thus invited a feedback loop in the film's own structure. Mother hasn't mentally revisited the scene of her crime amid the alien wheat. Rather, having muted this memory, she loses herself in the throb of asynchronous motion. The absent flashback is exactly the pain-killing point. For the cryptic opening shot, with its image of what will-have-happened, is now legible in retrospect—by the economy of a musical cue—as the future perfect tense of a final mental breach: not a return of the repressed but a return to its *eventual* erasure. This time, across time, there is no looking back. Even Bong's camera never returns to a full shot of the bus. It just sidles past the elongated, screen-shaped windows as Mother twists her heedless way down the aisle, oblivious, anonymous, exited for now from the weight of conscience: a silhouette against the fading sunset almost as lost to the camera as she is to herself in her morbid euphoria. The film's eventual blackout answers to her own.

Genre expectations have undergone strategic adjustment to achieve this closing impact. A melodrama grounded in social critique hasn't been tempered by comic relief. Rather, its desperations have been thrown into starker relief by the film's eccentric mixed mode, in touch with both the absurdities and the burdens of daily subsistence. And it's not only such incongruities of tone that have kept the narrative off-kilter, but the editing as well, with past invading present from various distances and separate perspectives, unsettling social as well as narrative continuity by a return of private nightmares. It is this uncertain balance in both pacing and emotional orientation that has opened narrative space at the end for a grim lyricism of denial, where any of the film's national overtones would reverberate not so much by overt political allusion as by tonal and formal dissonance. Though a lone parent may momentarily numb the pain of her generational trauma, history doesn't so easily forget.

NATAŠA ĎUROVČOVÁ is Editor at the International Writing Program, University of Iowa, and co-editor with Kathleen Newman of *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (Routledge/AFI, 2009).

GARRETT STEWART is James O. Freedman Professor of Letters at the University of Iowa and the author of *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

DVD DATA *Mother*. Director: Bong Joon-ho. © 2009 CJ Entertainment Inc./Barunson Co. Ltd. Publisher: Magnolia Home Entertainment. $26.98, 1 disc.

WROCŁAW, REYKJAVIK

As medium-sized events toward the end of the festival calendar, both the Wrocław Era New Horizons film festival in Poland (July 22–August 1) and Iceland's Reykjavik International Film Festival (September 23–October 3) aim to showcase challenging and innovative work. With much smaller press and industry contingents than at the big spring and summer festivals, these are audience events, showing new films to open-minded, enthusiastic, and demanding paying customers.

Wrocław programmed both a massive Godard retrospective (the director was scheduled to appear, but failed to do so—as he had at Cannes in May and would do again at Toronto in September). A season on a smaller scale was accorded to the films of Laura Mulvey, who did attend the festival, and the first movie I saw at Wrocław was her and Peter Wollen's 1974 debut feature, *Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons*. Despite the fact that she was once my MA course leader, I admit that I had never seen a film directed by Mulvey, though the fact is that her cinematic efforts, which have a reputation for being stringent and difficult, are far less easy to access than her theoretical writings. Yet if the Wrocław audience's reaction to *Penthesilea* is anything to go by, there's no good reason for this state of affairs. The screenings were sold out and the response was extremely warm and enthusiastic.

An interpretation of Greek myth, *Penthesilea* contains four distinct segments which make up a rumination on, among other things, the position of women in western art and society; the rarely acknowledged way that mainstream film conventions, especially continuity editing, reinforce ideological conventions; and the links between Heinrich von Kleist and Leni Reifenstahl. If the film's political enunciations now seem unfamiliarly forthright, the intellectual radicalism in display is none the less invigorating for that. The force of the polemic is matched by impressive formal rigor. A mime version of Kleist's play *Penthesilea* in the first segment has a hypnotic theatricality; the single take in which Wollen reads out an essay on the many and contested images of Penthesilea has a curious, rough-hewn virtuosity; and the collage of images of femininity in western art that comprises the third section has an associative playfulness that anticipates present-day digital assemblages—remixes, mashups, and the like. In an informative sidebar event, Polish scholar Jakub Majmurek noted that Polish film studies in the 1970s and 80s were heavily indebted to cognitive philosophy and tended to ignore the blend of Marxism, structuralism, and psychoanalysis with which Mulvey is so closely associated. The large audiences and lively Q&A sessions that accompanied the season of her complementary film work (DVD publishers should take note) indicate that times have changed.

A main plank of the Wrocław program is the International Competition, which focused on films from emerging talent. The exception to this was Harmony Korine, by far the most established of the four filmmakers selected, but his film, *Trash Humpers*, suggests he's uncomfortable with that position. A wilful act of regression—the movie was shot on VHS tape—this is Korine's attempt to reclaim the *enfant terrible* status of his early twenties (when he was poster boy for abrasive hipster cinema). The film follows a group of four figures, each wearing old-crone masks, causing various degrees of chaos in derelict patches of downtown Memphis. It's puerile, arguably idiotic, sometimes sheer slapstick, and to Korine's detractors the exercise can be written off as an episode of *Jackass*, with pretensions to video art. But *Trash Humpers* finds moments of delicate, melancholy beauty amid the urban scrapheaps and detritus that Korine films, and there is something undeniably infectious about its mood of childlike mischief and mayhem.

Having premiered in late 2009, *Trash Humpers* was the least fresh of the competition titles, most of which were selected from the major spring and summer festivals. A talking point of Cannes, Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le quattro volte*, also in competition, is a portrait of a farming community in Calabria, Southern Italy. Combining elements of poetic ethnography, observational documentary, and rural fable, the film is an almost entirely dialogue-free study of four "characters": an elderly shepherd, a kid goat, a tall fir tree, and a charcoal oven. What emerges is a study of the cyclical pattern of life and death in the natural world, one grounded in an earthy feel for the Calabrian landscape and village communities that stops things from lapsing into New Age mysticism. A work of visual elegance and contemplative charm, *Le quattro volte* features flashes of wry near-silent comedy and includes one stunning long-take sequence involving a curious dog, a runaway truck, a fenced-in enclosure of sheep, and some locals dressed as Roman centurions.

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 69–71, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.69

Mundane History and *Made in Poland*
Courtesy Wrocław Era New Horizons.

Estonian director Veiko Õunpuu's *The Temptation of St Tony* opens with a quote from Dante's *Inferno* and features among its closing credits acknowledgments to Pasolini and Buñuel. In between there are plenty more other references (to Tarkovsky, Kaurismäki, William Blake, Hieronymous Bosch). This deadpan allegorical drama about white-collar worker Tony's manager's descent into a private hell doesn't, however, quite merit these weighty allusions: the structure is so episodic as to be fragmentary, and the nicely underplayed sense of anarchy of the opening half tips into undisciplined self-indulgence (when the profane influence of Pasolini is most evident). But there are enough moments of arresting absurdism and several striking set pieces (all beautifully filmed in black-and-white) to make this exercise in style worthwhile.

The International Competition's main jury prize went to *Mundane History*, Thai director Anocha Suwichakornpong's striking debut, a drama set in contemporary Bangkok about the developing relationship between paralyzed young man Ake, son of a senior politician, and his carer Pun, recently relocated to the city from a humble rural background. Working with Apichatpong Weerasethakul's regular editor Lee Chatametikool, the film is a haunting and immersive mood piece that begins by charting with watchful, unhurried precision the daily rituals of Pun's care regime, before the tone turns much more mysterious, elusive, and reflective, culminating in a visit to a planetarium that is a trippy as anything in Gaspar Noé's *Enter the Void* (but without the pompous metaphysics). *Mundane History* is as fascinating as it is hard to classify. The other prizewinner in competition (awarded by the FIPRESCI jury) was the Russian film *Mama*, directed by Yelana and Nikolay Renard, about the relationship between an overbearing elderly mother and her grown-up, overweight son. *Mama* is shot with a fixed camera in a series of single-take vignettes, mostly set in the characters' cramped Moscow flat. The film remarkably conveys a sense of emotional claustrophobia; it is at once grotesque and strangely moving, captured with unblinking directness and commanding formal control.

Wrocław also provided a useful survey of contemporary Polish cinema in the New Polish Films competition. Of the films I saw, the strongest was Przemyslaw Wojcieszek's *Made in Poland*. Focused on seventeen-year-old working-class altar boy turned punk (whose first act is tattooing the words "fuck off" on his forehead), the film channels some of the character's disgust and anger at the older generation to make some spikey swipes of its own at Polish culture (the title's similarity to Alan Clarke's state-of-the-nation drama *Made in Britain* is surely not accidental). But for me the most moving Polish work was tucked away in a strand devoted to Films on Art (a surprisingly large collection of titles, including Sophie Fiennes's haunting study of the work and practice of German artist Anselm Kiefer, *Under Your Cities Will Grow Grass*). Wiktoria Szymanska's *Themerson & Themerson* is a beguiling and poignant documentary about the lives of the late avant-garde artists Franciszka and Stefan Themerson. A married couple, she was a painter and filmmaker, he a poet and writer. Mixing home movies and sensitive interviews with their surviving colleagues and friends, the film takes us from their enthusiastic involvement in pre-war Warsaw's experimental art scene through prolonged separation during World War II and finally to London where they settled and spent the rest of their life together. *Themerson & Themerson* is full of charm and affection, but a thread of melancholy runs through it, a powerful sense of the loss and suffering inflicted on their generation of Polish Jews.

⁂

With a similar emphasis on discovering new arthouse talent, the Reykjavik festival overlapped to an extent with Wrocław. The main jury prizewinner, for instance, was *Le quattro volte*.

There are never enough films to go round the plethora of international festivals and toward the end of the season, festivals like Reykjavik (as well as New York and London) pick up films from earlier events. Some of the outstanding titles from Venice and Locarno this year were also shown at Reykjavik, one of the most impressive being Greek director Anathia Rachel Tsangari's *Attenberg*. The film is a haunting drama, revolving around twenty-three-year-old Maria, whose father is dying of cancer. An emotionally disconnected young woman, she is a fan of the BBC nature documentaries presented by David Attenborough (of which the film's title is a mispronunciation). Tsangari's approach to depicting Maria's routine—her testy friendship with her sexually adventurous friend, her tentative, passionless attempt to pick up a stranger—might be said to have something of the restrained attention of Attenborough's work. There are shades, too, of Antonioni in Tsangari's feel for the expressive emotional potential of urban landscapes (the director's architect father designed the factory workers' town in which the film takes place). If the movie falters during its earlier more self-conscious formal flourishes—for instance an extended sequence in which Maria and her friend goof around (apparently in homage to Monty Python)—the film's quieter, more intimate moments between Maria and her ailing father are powerfully moving. *Maria* is another encouraging sign of the current strength of Greek cinema, after *Dogtooth* (whose director Yorgos Lanthimos features in a supporting role).

Equally striking was American director Kitao Sakurai's *Aardvark*. An atmospheric thriller, the film follows a blind recovering alcoholic, Larry, who sets out to avenge the murder of his friend by local gangsters. If that premise sounds improbable, Sakurai develops it with a hardboiled but dreamy intensity. This and the ambient electronic soundtrack recall Michael Mann's early work, but with an added homoerotic charge. Sakurai looks like a name to watch out for.

The banks crashed during the 2008 edition of the festival and two years later I saw occasional signs of the repercussions of Iceland's economic meltdown during my trip. But these were evidence less of any pressing financial distress (although this undoubtedly exists) as of the sense of humor which is such a robust strand in the national culture. For example, I witnessed the most well-behaved political demonstration I've ever seen outside a government building, the participants seemingly more bemused than angry. The prevailing attitude was best summed up by a T-shirt I saw in a souvenir shop—a picture of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano (whose eruption caused so much travel chaos this past summer) was emblazoned with the legend: "Don't Fuck with Iceland: We May Not Have the Cash but We Have the Ash."

Le quattro volte
Courtesy Reykjavik International Film Festival.

That tone of caustic wit also characterized Valdis Óskardóttir's *King's Road*, a raucous, cherishably misanthropic comedy about the various residents of a muddy trailer park community in rural Iceland. The film combines moments of droll domestic dysfunction with lively bits of slapstick and a running gag involving the Icelandic characters' refusal to speak English to German actor Daniel Bruhl. *Mamma Gógó*, the new film from Frithrik Thór Frithriksson, one of Iceland's most established directors, was a more somber affair—a heartfelt but sometimes heavy-handed autobiographical drama about a middle-aged filmmaker's mother succumbing to Alzheimer's that is enlivened by moments of low-key humor (mainly at the expense of the Icelandic film industry).

The best Icelandic film I saw received its world premiere at Reykjavik. The festival's closing-night film, Árni Ásgeirsson's *Undercurrent*, is an absorbing drama set on board a fishing vessel. The depiction of the crew members' hardships inevitably resonated with the country's economic situation. A beautifully played ensemble piece, the movie is based on a stage play, but Ásgeriersson's confident direction ensures that it works cinematically: portraying the reaction of the crew to the onboard suicide of their colleague on the last expedition, for example, the film evokes his memory through deft use of flashback. The death seems to haunt the ship; the cramped and dilapidated cabins seem the sites of an eerie unease. *Undercurrent*'s editing was completed in Poland, making it a rare co-production between the two countries which are also host to these fine arthouse festivals.

EDWARD LAWRENSON is film reviewer for *The Big Issue* (London).

DISASTER MOVIES

By the end of the *Inside Job* Q&A with director Charles Ferguson and producer Audrey Marrs at the London Film Festival, October 27, it was clear that this documentary's account of the colossal and coordinated act of financial malfeasance that led to the present economic crisis had elicited angry responses. One person called from the floor for the perpetrators of the "conspiracy" to be shot. Another congratulated the filmmakers before declaring that only something on a par with the Russian Revolution could truly deal with the root causes; nothing will change, she said, "until we see some bodies swinging from lampposts." (The festival programmer Michael Hayden gamely decided that this was a "good note to end on.") Like many recent political documentaries, *Inside Job* sets out not only to inform but also to rouse viewers to indignation. Ferguson explores how predatory bankers invested in subprime mortgages in the full knowledge of the risks involved. (In the aftermath of the ensuing disaster, grueling congressional hearings forced the financiers to admit their unscrupulousness and *Inside Job* includes clips of their testimony.) The festival also screened *Draquila: Italy Trembles*, Italian comedian Sabina Guzzanti's sardonic exposé of the way in which Silvio Berlusconi took advantage of the 2009 earthquake in L'Aquila (whence the pun in the title). The Italian premier used the powers bestowed upon the "Civil Protection" agency to deprive citizens of any say in the reconstruction of their city; many of them were then moved into apartments in new speculative developments. Berlusconi presented these buildings as if they were gifts from the prime minister himself, whereas in reality they were the result of a profitable privatization of the state's emergency powers. *Inside Job* and *Draquila* are, on different scales, both investigations of what Naomi Klein calls "disaster capitalism."

In laying out their arguments, both films resort to a familiarly eclectic assortment of techniques. Though interviews predominate, they are supplemented by graphics (garish collages in *Draquila*; satisfyingly pedagogical charts, diagrams, and textual excerpts in *Inside Job*), TV clips, and music-video montages. In sticking close to the everyday banality of disaster, low-budget *Draquila*'s use of handheld cameras to survey L'Aquila's devastation and its devastating "regeneration" is appropriate for the subject. *Inside Job*, however, has a big-budget aesthetic, including a celebrity narration provided by Matt Damon and epic outdoor shots—from Icelandic landscapes in the prologue to overviews of Manhattan skyscrapers and private jet hangers. Ferguson's film therefore follows a recent documentary trend (exemplified particularly in Edward Burtynsky's photographs) that tries to represent the effects of global capitalism in terms of a naturalist sublime. What to make of this spectacular imagery? It is surely legitimate to use diverse and even picturesque means to deliver knowledge to a disoriented public, especially in view of the widespread aversion that audiences often have to didacticism. And yet slickly attractive visuals can often mislead instead of illustrating. God's-eye images of pristine wildernesses in *Inside Job* seem sentimental in relation to the actual environmental damage caused by global speculation. Aerial shots of massed skyscrapers look fetishistic. The image of an empty Chinese factory represents the manufacturing downturn as an absence—social relations have disappeared—rather than a systemic calamity. And footage of Wall Street minions milling around nightclubs reduces the crisis to a question of immoral debauchery.

Inside Job is much more effective when it uses simpler, abstract means. It includes several minimalist diagrams detailing, for example, how insurance giant AIG was embroiled in the trading of "collateralized debt obligations" and "credit default swaps." These graphics convey a sense of the systemic patterns—the real but less visually alluring landscape of the crisis—in which individual greed and collective suffering find their place. This is not to say that documentaries should imitate PowerPoint presentations, but at least there is no danger with such a factual approach that spectacular visual clichés will obscure the issues.

Ferguson was able to gain access to an impressive array of interviewees. In elite, luxury settings—boardrooms, penthouses, ornate ministerial offices—we watch bankers, investors, lobbyists, journalists, economists, and ministers (including IMF head Dominique Strauss-Kahn, George Soros, former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker, French finance minister Christine Lagarde, and the amusingly candid economist for Citigroup, William Buiter) provide their partial, and sometimes self-incriminating, views on the bubble and the crash. Ferguson excels in building a composite narrative of the crisis out of these individual perspectives. Though the true

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 72–73, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.72

The financial elite

Inside Job. Bottom left: Glen Hubbard, Columbia Business School. Bottom right: Paul Volcker, Federal Reserve Board (1979–87).
Photos: Representational Pictures. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics.

villains of the piece (Lawrence Summers, Alan Greenspan, Ben Bernanke, and Hank Paulson in government, and the likes of Dick Fuld, Lloyd Blankfein, and John Thain among the investment bankers) all declined to appear, Ferguson corners some of their vassals and enablers, and this often makes for gripping viewing.

Whereas Guzzanti, like a somewhat subdued Michael Moore, is frequently present onscreen in *Draquila*, listening to evacuees and confronting officials, Ferguson never appears in *Inside Job*. Occasionally, however, his voice is heard interjecting, in exasperation, with remarks like "you can't be serious" or "you must be joking." He seems especially scornful of academic economists. As he probes the organic ties between the financial industry and the economics profession, he even drives Columbia Business School dean and former chief economist to the second President Bush, Glenn Hubbard, to a revealing moment of discomfited rage. There were dissenting experts who foresaw the crisis, including Nouriel Roubini and Raghuram Rajan (both of whom are interviewed), but their warnings were drowned out by the likes of Hubbard and his cringe-worthy colleague Frederic Mishkin. *Inside Job* shows plainly to what extent effective intellectual debate was curtailed and academic discourse debased in the run-up to the crisis. The radical American sociologist C. Wright Mills once wrote that when the bureaucracies of business and government faced each other across a table, beneath it their feet were entangled. If we add to this the facilitating functions of business schools, it is a proposition that lies at the core of Ferguson's film. The financial industry, the Treasury, and Ivy League universities are connected by a revolving door and this continues to be the case in what social justice advocate Robert Gnaizda calls in *Inside Job* President Obama's "Wall Street Government."

Emphasizing how the financial industry disastrously grew in power recently as a result of deregulation, Ferguson's film sometimes seems to be nostalgic for a better-regulated version of American capitalism, whose emblem is the Statue of Liberty (the last image of *Inside Job*). In this respect, *Inside Job* resembles some other critical screen texts of recent years, from *The Wire* to *Capitalism: A Love Story*. But even if we forget the unappetizing aspects of that earlier system (racism, sexism, Cold War nationalism), the fact is that the material conditions for its revival no longer exist. The elite venality that *Inside Job* exposes is often staggering, but it does not suffice to explain the precarious economic situation. Ferguson does not delve enough into such matters as the long-term crisis of profitability in the U.S. and the decline of its productive base. These are arguably the crucial determinants of the disaster and they cannot be rectified through either morality or regulation. It is not beyond the means of documentary film to pursue such problems, but it is beyond Ferguson's scope. *Inside Job* nevertheless performs a sterling service by letting us glimpse the tangled feet of finance, politics, and academia. Many will share the London viewers' rage at the evidence of corruption that the film uncovers.

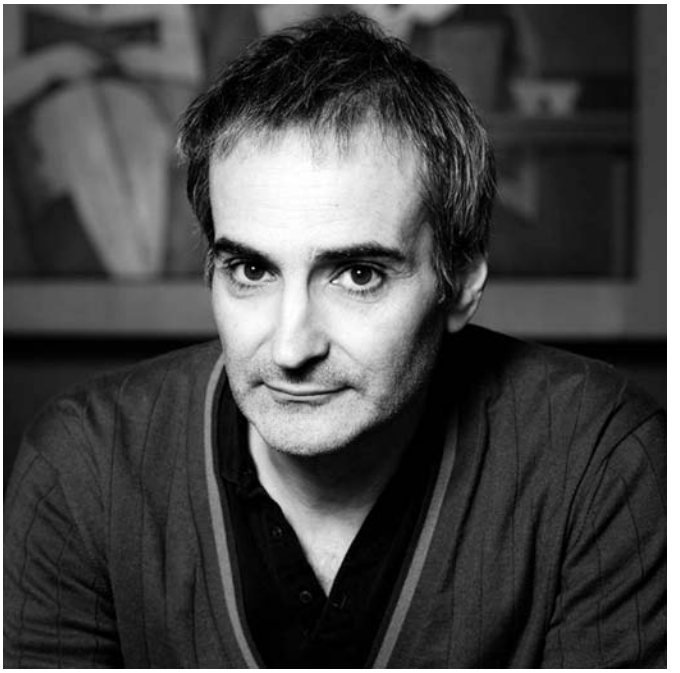
ALBERTO TOSCANO is the author of *Fanaticism: The Uses of an Idea* (Verso, 2010).

INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIER ASSAYAS

"To me he's a figure at Algiers airport: a man who was thin then, wearing a Che Guevara beret." Thus the controversial lawyer Jacques Vergès reminisces in Barbet Schroeder's fine documentary, *Terror's Advocate* (2007), speaking of Ilich Ramírez Sánchez—known as Carlos—the Venezuelan terrorist and revolutionary presently imprisoned in Poissy, France, for the 1975 rue Toullier murder of two French intelligence agents in Paris. Running nearly six hours in its full-length version, Olivier Assayas's three-part biopic sets out "to dismantle events and reveal them from the inside out" (to quote an interview included in the Optimum DVD edition). Though it is meticulously researched and designed, with a cast whose members closely resemble their real-life counterparts, *Carlos* not only opens with a disclaimer ("the film must be viewed as a fiction") but also takes the construction of its protagonist's celebrity as a theme. "You have become a star for the media," says Wadie Haddad, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, in part 1. "The famous Carlos." In part 2, after Carlos has flown kidnapped Arab oil ministers from Vienna to Algiers and ransomed them, there is a scene in which he is driven in a limousine toward a bank of photojournalists. The car slows down and he looks out over the rim of his sunglasses like a rock star.

As if to acknowledge the quip about weight gain made by Vergès, Assayas and his remarkable lead actor Edgar Ramírez relate Carlos's fame to physical transformation. Near the start, he emerges from a bathroom naked, switches off TV news broadcasting a politician's opinion that pro-Palestinian terrorism is "vicious and bestial," and then stands in the silence in front of the mirror. But if his athletic physique represents a newfound ability to prompt outraged punditry, then his self-regard suggests a superficiality of motivation. And Carlos gets noticeably bulkier when he is inactive. In the latter part of the film he is mostly indolent and purposeless as he shuttles between refuges, from Yemen to Hungary to Sudan—a legend still, but a hollow one, reduced from the man of action to a small player in the Great Game of international espionage. "Your notoriety is very precious to those men you deal with in the Middle East," says a bold left-wing journalist in part 3. "It's been a while [since you] had a headline and without newspapers you don't exist."

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 74–77, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.74



Olivier Assayas
Photo: Olivier Bernard.

For a short time, the Venezuelan sits near the top table. In part 2, he is present at a Baghdad meeting addressed by KGB head (and future Soviet leader) Yuri Andropov, who calls for the assassination of Egyptian ruler Anwar El Sadat. The last third of the film, however, creates a mood of lethargy and frustration as Carlos becomes increasingly marginalized. Called simply a "mercenary" by a Stasi official, his interactions take place at a lower level, until finally a Syrian functionary is heard to deliver a contemptuous assessment: "He's all washed up now. No longer of any use. Neither to us, nor to anyone else." This decline involves a new kind of visibility. Instead of being a celebrity of primetime news, Carlos becomes an object of bureaucratic surveillance by various intelligence agencies. Then finally, exiled in Khartoum, where he acquires the unillustrious new nickname of "the phantom," his famous image is reduced to his appearance in a French investigator's photographs. The Sudanese leader examines the pictures and then consents to Carlos's capture. In subtly exploring terrorism's iconography, Assayas brings Carlos out of the shadows again.

Carlos can usefully be related to several films of the past decade that dramatize the history of left-wing militancy in the 1960s and 70s, notably *Good Morning, Night* (Marco

Bellochio, 2003), *United Red Army* (Koji Wakamatsu, 2007), *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (Uli Edel, 2008), and *Che* (Steven Soderbergh, 2008). I watched *Carlos* at the London Film Festival (October 13–28) and I was struck by its affinity also with two other French movies screened at the festival, Rachid Bouchareb's *Outside the Law* (about the Algerian FLN's bloody independence campaign inside France) and Xavier Beauvois's *Of Gods and Men* (concerning a group Christian monks endangered by an Islamist uprising in 1990s Algeria). Like *Carlos*, these two films engage with the topic of terrorism using a combination of thriller conventions and arthouse self-awareness. (*Outside the Law* is a fresh take on the French Resistance drama that is also influenced by *Rocco and His Brothers* [1960], while *Of Gods and Men* is like a John Ford cavalry Western with added prayer and chanting.) There is great upheaval in France at the moment. Millions of people have been demonstrating against the austerity measures of President Nicolas Sarkozy, who attacked the "immoral" legacy of May '68 in a 2007 speech. It is too soon to tell whether he will be undone by a renewal of French radicalism, but certainly it is a time of profound debate about the country's future and these three films reflect that. When I met Olivier Assayas on October 25, I wanted to ask about both the political background to *Carlos* and the director's own opinions.[†]

Rob White: You would have been twenty when Carlos was first becoming famous. How did he seem then? What kind of figure was he?

Olivier Assayas: Well it was really hard to make sense of him. I was a student at the time and the killings in rue Toullier happened in an area that was very familiar to me—I would walk it every day, it's right off the boulevard St. Michel, which was the center of the Latin Quarter at that time. He was from Venezuela and was possibly involved in some sort of Palestinian politics, but that was kind of unclear, and he had killed those two French secret service guys. And he had vanished. It was very difficult to read through that. And even when he staged the Vienna operation a few months later, it was not like this was in the news as a Carlos operation. It was all about the operation itself and there was one guy who might have been the head of the commando itself who would eventually turn out to be the same guy who killed the cops in rue Toullier. But that was something that was only analyzed much later. So he grew as some kind of poster boy for terrorism at that time—but some international, extremely mysterious form of terrorism. Carlos, for example, had absolutely no connection whatsoever with French militants. He wasn't connected to French leftism so you couldn't really put him on the map. The events in which he was involved were very striking but he has always been perceived as a media fabrication. He wasn't considered at the time as an important, relevant militant of his cause. He was always a creature of the media.

Were his actions in any way approved of by elements of French leftism?

Before he was Carlos, he was involved in the failed bombings of El Al planes in Orly and the attack on the French embassy in The Hague by the Japanese Red Army. Within French leftism there was at that time a debate about whether to get involved in armed struggle the way the Germans and the Italians had done. Ultimately, even if there were isolated actions, the core of French leftism was clearly against terrorism, against moving to armed struggle. It's what differentiated French leftism from the German or Italian counterparts. It also has to do with the fact that France was much less than those countries the frontline in the Cold War. Carlos was always perceived as being part of some other war that was disconnected from the goals and ideals and world view of the French left. He was never endorsed. Although there has always been a lot of sympathy in France for the Palestinian cause, no one knew the extent of his connection or the coherence of his positions in regard to the Palestinian movement, especially because all his visible operations were anti-Arafat (and so perceived as some kind of infighting, which gave the cause a bad name). I can't think of Carlos being a sympathetic figure for the French left.

I was recently reading a 1976 *Cahiers du cinéma* round-table discussion of Chris Marker's newly released *A Grin Without a Cat*. The opinion of the *Cahiers* critics seems to be against Marker—that he's a traditional communist, let's say, whereas they're associated with a more radical tendency. As someone who wrote at a later date for *Cahiers* can you situate yourself politically in regard to the magazine's line?

The period of *Cahiers* that you're referring to is the most political period of the magazine and I can't say that I sympathized with their politics at that time. My brand of leftism was much more more connected to the ideas of the Situationist International and Guy Debord specifically, which constituted the framework of my politics. Also as a teenager, the huge influence was George Orwell. So I was extremely opposed to anything that smelled of totalitarianism and I think that the politics of *Cahiers* at that time were defined by the relationship to totalitarianism. When I started writing for the magazine it was at a moment when it was certainly more open and had moved away from those politics. Otherwise I don't think I could have been involved.

***Carlos* joins a number of other films about the radical left in the 1960s and 70s: *The Baader Meinhof Complex, Che, Terror's Advocate*. What do you think is at stake in general terms about the way in which filmmakers are reflecting on radicalism and terror in this period?**

I would add *United Red Army* by Koji Wakamatsu, which is also important. It's difficult to answer. Once you look more

From celebrity to capture

Carlos. © Film en Stock/Egoli/Tossell Film Carlos GmbH. DVD: Optimum Home Entertainment (U.K.).

precisely into it, the movies are defined by very different dynamics. I think it's interesting that Wakamatsu and Edel would both do movies about terrorism in their own respective countries. It has been for a long time an *extremely* painful subject in those countries. Dealing with the story of the Baader–Meinhof group in Germany and making a mainstream film that deals in a frontal way with those characters in German culture is some kind of revolution. I'm not German and I'm not an expert, but I never really bought the collective suicide theory. For me it's absolutely impossible to believe. So I don't think *The Baader Meinhof Complex* fully addresses the issue. The supposed suicides in Stammheim prison are for me the elephant in the living room of German politics dealing with that subject. You have to take a position on the subject and face it. *The Baader Meinhof Complex* doesn't exactly face it. Wakamatsu makes a movie about the Japanese Red Army which is a both movie about ultra-left politics in Japan at that time and a movie about the Manson Family. The so-called Mountain House Murders sealed the fate of the Japanese Red Army. They found all those people who had been tortured and killed after political trial. It created such a reaction of horror in the country that it killed the idea of leftism in Japan. In those two cases, you need the perspective of a generation in order to face it without burning your

fingers. I suppose for those movies, it really has to do with time passing.

In the case of *Carlos*, it's slightly different. He's an "evil" character. He's always been perceived in France as suspect, compromised. Still he's not feared. He's not involved with these memories that are complicated to face in terms of the politics of the 1970s. The reasons it's possible to tell the story now have to do with time, but for different reasons. Carlos is a creature of the Cold War and ultimately the files of the Cold War are available. And a lot of individuals connected to Carlos have published their memoirs. So thanks to time passing, a lot of the elements of the story of Carlos are accessible—and basically it's a sort of secret-service story. We can tell this story now. *Che* is something else. I liked *Che* very much. It's a very ambitious and fascinating film about strategy, a reflection on guerilla strategy that analyzes in detail how you win or lose a guerilla war. It was inspiring for me in terms of how you could make a movie about a specific historical figure, using a big canvas and somehow dealing not only with the character but also with issues that are bigger than that. *Carlos* is both about Carlos and about geopolitics and it was *Che* that gave me the key in terms of functioning on those different levels.

There's the scene of Carlos looking at himself naked in the mirror. He refers often to things like "the anti-imperialist struggle" but it seems like empty sloganeering. Is the character just a narcissist?

The media image of Carlos includes the notion of him as some kind of theoretician of terrorism, involved in the higher echelons of politics. But the reality is that he was never involved there. He's a militant and so he does repeat slogans that get thinner and thinner as the times change and the Cold War gets to its last moments. Carlos has mostly been a man of action, a militant of the PFLP who executed operations that had been designed by other people, chiefly Wadie Haddad. Carlos himself had only a partial notion of the geopolitical consequences of his acts or even of where they stood in terms of his ideals. He is a Third World militant and very similar to others of his generation. He comes from Latin America, which at that time is a world which is at war—a violent, bloody war. Then he studies in Moscow and he finds himself, nineteen years' old, with a gun in his hand fighting in Jordan during the Black September days. So he is someone who's involved in the physical part of the struggle, but not in the theoretical one. He never really gets there because he always enjoyed the celebrity, for not always very relevant reasons—and that's the narcissism, the media-consciousness. The media picked up on him because he gave them something. But mostly if you're involved with terrorist action, you don't want to be in the limelight! I met Anis Naccache, who is "Khalid," in Beirut when we were preparing the film. One extremely interesting thing he told me is that, whatever you think of his politics, he was extremely proud that the fact that he was second-in-command of the Vienna operation only surfaced something like twenty-five years after the operation. There's not one biography of Carlos that mentions that Khalid is Anis Naccache. At some point he couldn't hide it anymore, but he said to me: "I am a militant and of course I don't want my name in the press. So I moved on, I trained militants in the south of Lebanon, who gradually became the military infrastructure of Hizbollah." You may or may not agree with this politics but he has been extremely coherent and he has done his job. And he said: "Carlos has been in the spotlight and what did he do with that?"

You write in the IFC press notes that "we must tackle the way [Carlos] embodied the deformed, twisted version in the imaginations of the European Left; the generation that, in the wake of May '68, believed that revolution was coming and it would be a violent struggle." The legacy of '68 has been denounced by Sarkozy and defended by writers like Alain Badiou. How does *Carlos* fit with this debate and what is your own position?

It would not be anywhere close to Badiou and it would certainly not be anywhere close to Sarkozy! I was defined by the politics of May '68, but for me May '68 was an anti-totalitarian uprising. People seem to forget that at the occupied Odéon theater, you had the crossed flags—black and red, and I was on the side of the black element. And the red element was not that strong. People like Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the Nanterre *enragés*—what was so striking, and so violent ultimately, about it was a way of regaining the idea of revolution from the bureaucrats of the Communist Party. The party was violently against '68. They hated every minute of it and they killed it in the end. The reason why the uprising ended was because the unions, which were entirely controlled by the French Communist Party at the time, just decided that they didn't want it to go on and they sent everybody back to work. But that wasn't my side. I was defined by the idea that this insurrection *could have worked*, that it could have gone much further, and I was part of the leftists who never really forgave that betrayal. And for me the central element of May '68 was the Situationist involvement, the committee of the occupation of the Sorbonne during the most radical and extremist days involved the Situationists. They were at the forefront.

†Thanks to Zoe Flower for arranging the interview.

DVD DATA *Carlos* [U.K. DVD title: *Carlos the Jackal*]. Director: Olivier Assayas. © Film en Stock/Egoli/Tossell Film Carlos GmbH. Publisher: Optimum Home Entertainment (U.K.). £19.99, 3 discs. U.S. distributor: IFC Films.

FOUR BOOKS ABOUT TERRENCE MALICK

DAVID STERRITT

Thanks to Terrence Malick's reticent personality, most biographical sketches focus on the constantly repeated points I'm about to repeat again here. After studying and briefly teaching philosophy, publishing his translation of a text by Martin Heidegger along the way, Malick enrolled in the brand-new American Film Institute and made cinema his career. His first feature, *Badlands*, created a critical stir in 1973 with its meticulously crafted story of a Midwestern murder spree perpetrated by a deracinated young couple in the 1950s. His second film, the 1978 melodrama *Days of Heaven*, also tells of an outlaw couple and uses an offbeat female voiceover to advance and counterpoint the narrative; its reviews were more divided, although it earned a prize for best director at Cannes and four Academy Award nominations.

Two decades of silence then ensued, during which Malick withdrew to work on various projects—a story of psychoanalysis in the nineteenth century, a Jerry Lee Lewis biopic—that never materialized. He returned to the screen in 1998 with a large-scale adaptation of James Jones's 1962 novel *The Thin Red Line*, a grunt's-eye view of American soldiers in the Guadalcanal campaign of World War II; again box-office returns were disappointing and reviews tended to show more respect for Malick's intentions than excitement over what he'd accomplished. By the time he released *The New World* in 2005, critical opinion had hardened—he was a cinematic philosopher to some, an insufferable aesthete to others—and everyday moviegoers were less interested than ever in the deliberately paced, audiovisually dense stylistics that have become his trademark. At this writing the release date for his latest picture, *Tree of Life*, has not been announced.

In the introduction to *The Thin Red Line*, his volume in Routledge's recently inaugurated Philosophers on Film series, editor David Davies expresses surprise that "there are to date few critical studies" of Malick's work, considering his "elevated standing in the pantheon of modern directors" (1). Davies goes on to list five studies already published and one in the works, not counting Lloyd Michaels's monograph *Terrence Malick* in the University Press of Illinois Press's valuable Contemporary Film Directors series. It can as well be said that two critical monographs, two edited collections, and a growing number of serious critical essays is a surprisingly large bibliography for a filmmaker with only four films to write about. Then too, the elevation of Malick's standing is not as apparent to everyone as Davies assumes. Andrew Sarris watched *Days of Heaven* and found "its drama deficient . . . its psychology obscure," while Gilbert Adair found *The Thin Red Line* to be "bludgeoned by gorgeousness" and J. Hoberman disparaged *The New World* as "monumentally slight" (40, 10, 84). Yet equal passion motivates Malick's defenders, including the writers whose books and essays I'm reviewing here. Most are versatile scholars who go beyond auteurism and cinephilia to discuss areas of aesthetics, philosophy, and intertextuality that are central to Malick's work.

I'll begin with Michel Chion, whose (too) rhapsodically written study of *The Thin Red Line*, translated from the French by Trista Selous, was published in the BFI Modern Classics series in 2004 and became something of a pacesetter in the field. In an unusual move, Chion begins with a few brief questions and propositions that summarize his feelings about the film, and ends with a scene breakdown intended as a viewer's guide but not meant to prevent us from seeing the film "in all the deliberate confusion of its narration" (74). Between these markers he looks into an array of major issues, of which I'll single out one as an example of his approach.

In a section called "Paradise in Three Dimensions," Chion notes that while the dialogue refers more than once to the fact that Guadalcanal is an island, it is visualized as such at only one fleeting moment, on a map displayed to a group of officers. Yet the concept of *island* is a persistent theme in the film. Sometimes it's taken up positively, as when First Sergeant Welsh (Sean Penn) likens salvation to the idea of making an island for himself, and again in the film's last shot, which shows the mysteriously resonant image of a coconut shell sprouting a green shoot in the midst of a pool of water on a beach. In general, however, the film complicates and even negates *island* as a conceptual motif. Chion notes that the camera rarely rises → high enough to show the land's relationship to the encircling

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 78–81, ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.78

sea, and goes on to observe that in the film's overall trajectory, the characters "cross first a plain, then a river, then . . . climb higher and higher to reach [a] bunker. But when they get there, Malick avoids any images that might give an impression of dominance in relation to the surrounding space . . . In his work, human beings never conquer space; they only meet other human beings" (48–9). And even then their speech is largely inner speech, unheard by the others around them.

Every man in Malick's movie is an island, then, enclosed with others on a geographical island whose confining limits can only be transcended by venturing into the water that surrounds it, in which (at both the beginning and ending of the film) people find the "paradisiacal freedom" (50) of moving through three dimensions with no physical or cultural boundaries to hem them in. Those familiar with the novel will find this a significant change of emphasis, since Jones portrays the soldiers very much as an organic unit bound by common hardships, duties, and dangers. In any case, Chion finds the island theme to be positive and negative at once. The film's famous voiceovers, for example, are "islands of words" that "do not mingle with the surrounding air, as though they were enclosed in the 'moving box' that is the human soul." Yet at the same time, these separate voices constitute a single voice that offers "the modulated meditations of a single collective consciousness . . . In the logic of the film, it is out of extreme human isolation and insularity . . . that 'together-ness' can emerge" (55, 57). These insights do much to illuminate what is arguably Malick's greatest film to date.

One of the more interesting essays in the new edition of *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America*, edited by Hannah Patterson, is Adrian Martin's contribution, "Approaching the New World," which starts with the arresting observation that Q'Orianka Kilcher's character in *The New World* is named Pocahontas for the first and only time in the final credits; and this is no accident, since that name has already been purposefully erased within the story. The erasure happens when a Jamestown woman says to her new acquaintance, "My name's Mary, and yours I believe is. . .," whereupon another character interrupts her by declaring, "She says it's not her name any more. She hasn't got a name." Identity thus emerges (with a strong feminist inflection) as one of the film's principal concerns. Martin goes on to discuss *The New World* as Malick's first film to treat love not as infatuation or intoxication but as a full-scale existential event with "transformative, even utopian power" (217), and later he comments on the risks and rewards of the improvisational, almost free-form shooting style that Malick now embraces. Martin's writing is marred (again) by schoolmarmish sniping at critics less enlightened than he—"One of the worst habits of film commentary . . ." (213), "Studies of a director's career often impose . . ." (214), "the rush to judgment so typical of contemporary film criticism . . ." (218)—and occasional slips of language, as when critic Vachel Lindsay becomes just Vachel (215). Such blemishes aside, however, this is a stimulating article.

Not surprisingly, various essays in these books explore Heideggerian ideas that recur in Malick's movies, as when the filmmaker's philosopher friend Hubert Dreyfuss teams with Camilo Salazar Prince to discuss the phenomenon of "world collapse," which is the loss not of life but of what gives meaning to one's life, in "*The Thin Red Line*: Dying Without Demise, Demise Without Dying," a distinguished entry in Davies's collection. A few years ago I argued (in my essay "Film, Philosophy, and Terrence Malick's *New World*," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 6, 2006) that Ludwig Wittgenstein's influence on Malick deserves more attention than it has received, since (to mention one of several reasons) both are concerned less with the psychological self (the fulcrum of conventional fiction) than with the "philosophical self," defined by Wittgenstein as "the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world—not a part of it." Wittgenstein is hardly mentioned in these volumes, though, so his hour in Malick studies has evidently not come round. I'm also disappointed that none of the books contain meaningful discourse about the imperialist implications coiled within *The New World*. This isn't the place for a discussion of colonial ideology vis-à-vis Malick's aesthetically inflected historiography, but his transcendental view of an ultimately harmonious cosmos is a questionable frame for a fact-based narrative rooted in invasion, violence, and conquest. This increasingly bothers me despite my admiration for other qualities of the film, and when Pocahontas's matronly English guardian exhorts her to face life's tribulations like a tree, always reaching for the light even when vital branches have been stripped away, it feels like hopefulness has crowded history off the screen.

Another challenge faced by advocates of *The New World* is the similarity between its telling of the Pocahontas story

BOOK DATA

Michel Chion, *The Thin Red Line*. London: BFI Publishing, 2004. $14.95 paper. 96 pages.

David Davies (ed.), *The Thin Red Line*. London: Routledge, 2008. $90.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 128 pages.

Lloyd Michaels, *Terrence Malick*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008. $65.00 cloth; $19.95 paper. 144 pages.

Hannah Patterson (ed.), *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America*, 2nd edn. London: Wallflower Press, 2007. $80.00 cloth; $25.00 paper. 232 pages.

and the version long enshrined by American pop culture, most notoriously in the animated *Pocahontas* released by Walt Disney Pictures in 1995. Iain Macdonald tackles this issue in an essay for Davies's volume called "Nature and the Will to Power in Terrence Malick's *The New World*," achieving decidedly mixed results. Parallels between the Malick and Disney films abound, as Macdonald conscientiously shows: casting (Christian Bale as John Rolfe, Irene Bedard as Pocahontas's mother), repeated gestures (hats doffed in Pocahontas's honor), compositional similarities (close-ups of a compass), and so on. Having adduced this evidence, Macdonald recuperates *The New World* by means of a novel distinction between "unintentional" and "calculated" triteness, hypothesizing that the hokey, hackneyed aspects of Malick's film are "clues" signaling that his Disneyesque approach is a deliberate artistic and philosophical choice.

Malick's goal, Macdonald concludes, is "to awaken the viewer to the necessary and inescapable process of nature by the ruse of a self-deconstructing narrative" that reveals a "deeper process" by which "one kind of order yields to another . . . of which it is a part," demonstrating "human self-understanding . . . to be parasitical upon the obscure becoming of nature or what Nietzsche calls the will to power, that is, the *real* 'war' in the heart of nature" (104–6). I think this description of Malick's intention makes a valuable point about the layering, interweaving, and thematic intricacy that have become his most imposing signatures. But the notion that Malick set out to make a film so laden with clichés that it ends up "canceling itself out" (105) seems far-fetched, to put it mildly. My own theory (also far-fetched, I admit) is that since narrative isn't very important to him, he decided to Disney the movie up because that might make it more popular, thereby boosting his cred in the industry that sustains his career. The war in the heart of Hollywood is also very real.

A necessary condition for worthwhile discourse about Malick is sensitivity to the intertextual threads that play such a strong part in his cinema's allure. "Calm," the essay by Simon Critchley in Davies's collection, develops the idea that the speculations of Private Witt (Jim Caviezel) on death and immortality in Jones's book and Malick's film of *The Thin Red Line* repeat the thoughts of protagonist Robert E. Lee Prewitt (pre-Witt) in Jones's 1951 war novel *From Here to Eternity* (14). Several articles in Patterson's volume are also praiseworthy in this regard. Robert Silberman's essay "Terrence Malick, Landscape, and 'What is the war in the heart of nature?'" traces the nature imagery in *The Thin Red Line* to a cultural "obsession with tropical exoticism" ingrained in everything from Winslow Homer's painting and James A. Michener's prose to Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical comedy (166). James Wierzbicki's essay on "Sound as Music in the Films of Terrence Malick" makes many ingenious points about diegetic sound and Camille Saint-Saëns's music in *Days of Heaven*, although it fails to draw solid conclusions from them. James Morrison's article "Making Worlds, Making Pictures" compares the England of *The New World* with that of Stanley Kubrick's 1975 epic *Barry Lyndon* (208–9), among other things, and Stacy Peebles's essay "The Other World of War" powerfully relates facets of *The Thin Red Line* to the American transcendentalists' ideas of Nature and the Over-Soul.

Michaels's monograph is especially sensitive to allusiveness and intertextuality, using a telephoto shot of Kit (Martin Sheen) to link *Badlands* with T. S. Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men" (1925) and connecting Witt's last voiceover in *The Thin Red Line* with moments in early Renaissance literature when characters continue to ask questions from beyond the grave (31, 73). Michaels also shows how Stephen Crane's novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) influenced the "contemplation of existential questions and . . . interrogation of nature's beauty and indifference to man's fate" in *The Thin Red Line*, and explores ways in which (as Malick has acknowledged) the narration by Linda (Linda Manz) in *Days of Heaven* echoes the eponymous heroes of Mark Twain's novels *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)—the former in its conventional point of view and eagerness to please, and the latter in its "preternatural sensitivity" and its childlike inability (or refusal) to order experience into customary patterns. He also points out that Linda's denial of clear-cut human morality—"You just got half devil and half angel in you"—echoes the "dualistic theology" that Huck espouses (under Jim's influence) when he remarks, "Dey's two angels hoverin' roun' 'bout him . . . De white one gits him to go right, den de black one sail in en bust it all up" (61, 42, 43). This is not deep philosophy, but it's pretty much unarguable.

Patterson's book contains several essays in addition to the items I've mentioned, the best of which include Mark Cousins's refreshingly personal take on *The New World*, John Orr's look at the movie Western according to Malick and Arthur Penn, and John Streamas's excellent analysis of *The Thin Red Line* and the so-called Greatest Generation, a phrase I wish I'd never have to hear again. The heartening message I take away from these books is that some of the most gifted film scholars around are increasingly attracted to Malick's cinema. I await the next crop with whetted appetite.

DAVID STERRITT, chief book critic of *Film Quarterly* and adjunct professor at Columbia University, wrote the program essay for the Criterion Collection's recent DVD release of *The Thin Red Line*.

WILLIAM PAUL

Comedy Incarnate: Buster Keaton, Physical Humor, and Bodily Coping by Noël Carroll

City Lights by Charles J. Maland

As perhaps the surest sign that film studies have moved beyond the canon wars, the past decade has seen quite a few monographs on individual films. Two recent titles center on films that are about as canonical as you can get: Buster Keaton's *The General* (1926) by Noël Carroll in *Comedy Incarnate: Buster Keaton, Physical Humor, and Bodily Coping* and Charles Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931) in a book of the same title by Charles J. Maland. Canon formation is an ambition of each to the extent that Carroll and Maland both seek to claim the centrality of *The General* and *City Lights* in the respective careers of Keaton and Chaplin. In this regard, Carroll seems to me more successful, in part because his more thoroughly analytical approach provides greater substance. And yet, much as I value book-length exegeses, I found varying degrees of dissatisfaction with each.

Of the two, Carroll's *Comedy Incarnate* is the more ambitious as it seeks to define a way of approaching physical comedy specifically and film comedy in general. The book is overtly polemical, although it is a polemic that dates to an early period of academic film studies: the claim that film criticism requires a visual rather than literary approach. If this invokes a past battle, that is because the bulk of the book is made up of Carroll's Ph.D. dissertation, bookended by a new introduction and an appendix that reconsiders his polemic. There is no indication of revision, most footnotes date to the 1970s or earlier, and the dissertation qualities are fairly evident in the final text. Exhaustiveness might be valued in graduate student work, but in this book it becomes repetitive. A detailed analysis of one or two gags with a summary indication of how they might apply to other examples would suffice to make Carroll's points about gag construction. Nevertheless, example follows example, with every example proving what has already been proven by other examples.

This is regrettable because Carroll's typology of Keaton's gags is convincing, as is the thematic concern he derives from it. Following Gerald Mast, Carroll draws on Henri Bergson's notions of inattentiveness and inelasticity as central to comedy. But Carroll also differs from Mast, rightly I think, in that he wants to limit inattentiveness and inelasticity to a specific type of gag in Keaton, a type that plays on the character's seeming ineptitude. Another type of gag moves in the opposite direction by drawing comedy from the character's often astonishing triumph in seemingly impossible circumstances. Carroll thinks these other gags can best be theorized by drawing on Gestalt theory, but an analysis of comedy offered by Suzanne Langer might also be worth considering here since she was directly influenced by Bergson's vitalism: in *Feeling and Form* (1952), Langer defines the comic hero's triumph in adverse circumstances as a major source of comedy. Whatever the theoretical armature, Carroll's setting the two types of gags against each other, bolstered by a meticulous analysis of Keaton's visual style, provides a solid foundation for his claim that Keaton's central theme is "concrete intelligence," a celebration of man's ability to adapt to changes in the environment.

Why, then, does the intensive visual analysis, which I ordinarily value, seem needlessly elaborated? The problem lies in the book's overriding polemic, which restricts what the analysis can accomplish. In the body of the book, Carroll deliberately confines his discussion to an "iconic analysis" of Keaton's gags and a detailed exploration of Keaton's film style by consciously forswearing narrative analysis. In an appendix acknowledging the limitation of his analysis, Carroll offers a "narrative analysis" as "partial penance for my youthful arrogance" (171). But Carroll's narrative analysis also has clear limits: as a structuralist explication of comic narrative, it leaves out an enormous amount of material that is part of our experience of any narrative, what we might call "narrative content." Take, for example, the Civil War setting. Carroll asserts it does not have much significance for our experience of the film, noting that the protagonists of the original story were Northerners, and it would make no difference if Johnny Gray were a Northerner. Since Keaton is attracted to the North–South conflict in other films and chose to embody the character's Confederate status in his very name, I am much less inclined to pass over this alteration. Similarly, Carroll's defense of the film's final war sequence as necessary to a happy ending predicated on Johnny's heroic action makes me want to note that the heroic action *within* the narrative is contextualized by history itself. That is, it is impossible for us to watch the film without knowing that the South loses—that Johnny's heroism might win the girl, but the larger history undercuts a celebration of that heroism.

All this suggests there is a darker side to Keaton that Carroll leaves unaddressed. He covincingly posits Keaton's valorization of manual labor as something that made him especially appealing to a 1920s audience increasingly alienated from work as productive activity, but fails to address why surrealists in the same period were also drawn to Keaton. And claiming the same appeal for the success of the

FILM QUARTERLY ONLINE

Sample articles and web exclusives
are available on the redesigned website:

www.filmquarterly.org

During your visit, you can also join our
Facebook page and sign up for the editor's quarterly
e-newsletter.

Keaton revival in the 1960s and 70s overlooks the rise of absurdism as a dominant movement in theater and prose fiction in that period. Carroll's Keaton could not envision that seemingly predestined conjunction with Samuel Beckett. This failure becomes most apparent in Carroll's treatment of Keaton's character. Perhaps an attempt to analyze character would seem too literary for Carroll, but the failure–success pattern Carroll finds in Keaton's narratives makes me want to ask, why doesn't this character understand at first what he understands later? Carroll's failure–success narrative pattern seems right on target, but it alone cannot account for a character who consequently seems to alternate between dumb and smart.

Rather than the character's variable intelligence, the unintelligibility of the world seems to me a likelier explanation for this pattern. Unintelligibility would in turn make the inevitable chaos of a wartime setting particularly apt for Keaton, as is the chaos in the climactic scenes of in *Seven Chances* (1925) and *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928). Keaton's world is one in which nature is not entirely predictable because it is ever-changing, and even Bergsonian attentiveness would not ensure adaptability because of insufficient data. The unpredictability of the world is, I believe, the reason water is such a frequently repeated and ultimately key setting in Keaton's work. Even in the fairly dry world of *The General*, the climactic battle scene ends with a flood. Keaton's world then is one in constant flux, not just because the character might find himself in a new environment (as in the first half of *Steamboat Bill Jr.*), but because the environment itself might change radically (the last half hour of the same film); it is a world of accident in search of a design. Success follows failure for Keaton as the character catches up, momentarily, with ever-changing nature, but the frequently muted endings of his films leave us with a sense that such alignment is always temporary and the only possible permanence is death.

Ruling out the "literary" and narrative content ends up eliminating much in Keaton that makes him a greater artist than the one presented in this book. And ultimately it is the avoidance of narrative that makes the book so repetitious, as each example seems to end up proving the same thing over and over and over again. This is, in fact, not the case in the film itself since narrative context will render each gag different, much as it might share commonalities with other gags. Some attention to narrative, not simply narrative structure, could greatly enrich this discussion and perhaps present a more multidimensional view of Keaton. Although Carroll's typology of gags offers a good introduction to Keaton's comedy, the book's polemic does not allow it to move beyond this premise.

Charles Maland's *City Lights* for the most part eschews the kind of analytical criticism that is central to Carroll's approach. Instead, this short volume offers a history of the film's production; much of this has been dealt with elsewhere (notably by David Robinson and Kevin Brownlow), although a footnote promises more material in a forthcoming volume drawing on the Chaplin archives in Bologna. The rest of the book is taken up with a detailed, almost scene-by-scene description of the film, interspersed with occasional and often vague claims of thematic effectiveness or affecting emotion. Because Maland particularly values the pathos in Chaplin, he devotes two whole chapters to the ending of *City Lights*, a scene he repeatedly describes as "heartbreaking." This simple assertion remains the extent of Maland's analysis; otherwise, the film is described in exhaustive detail unshaped by an argument. Why should a comedy end with heartbreak? Does the sudden shift in tone retroactively affect our understanding of the comedy? Does pathos work against comedy or does it in some way complement it? A claim for the greatness of *City Lights* based on Chaplin's use of pathos needs to address these kinds of questions. I agree with the stature Maland accords *City Lights*, but unfortunately cannot find the evidence in this volume for doing so. © 2010 William Paul

WILLIAM PAUL was the Fulbright Distinguished Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, spring 2009. He is the author of *Ernst Lubitsch's American Comedy* (1983) and *Laughing Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy* (1994), both published by Columbia University Press. He is a professor of film and media studies at Washington University.

BOOK DATA Noël Carroll, *Comedy Incarnate: Buster Keaton, Physical Humor, and Bodily Coping.* New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. $89.95 cloth; $31.95 paper. 192 pages.

Charles J. Maland, *City Lights.* London: BFI Film Classics, 2008. $14.95 paper. 272 pages.

SUZANNE LEONARD

Sex and the City by Deborah Jermyn

Beautiful TV: The Art and Argument of "Ally McBeal" by Greg M. Smith

If there were such a thing as a postfeminist television canon, *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002) and *Sex and the City* (1998–2004) would surely occupy commanding—if not outright dominating—positions. In December 2009 in the *Guardian*, Naomi Wolf labeled Carrie Bradshaw the "feminist icon" of the decade, stating that she "did as much to shift the culture around certain women's issues as real-life feminist groundbreakers." It is hard not to think that Wolf was belatedly rebutting *Time* magazine's famous cover story in 1998 on the death of the feminist movement, which featured a photo of actress Calista Flockhart as the neurotic Ally McBeal to prove its point. Both citations seem, however, less momentous for what they actually say about the cause than for their evidencing of the fact that pundits and scholars alike look to popular culture and its female icons in order to discern feminism's contemporary significance. In an era that saw few comparable productions, *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and City* depicted single thirty- and fortysomething women navigating life in a cosmopolitan milieu, and in so doing offered insight into the challenges of modern femininity with its attendant pressures of love, work, friendship, and sexuality. This formula has since then been widely copied in popular series like *Desperate Housewives*, *Ugly Betty*, and *The Real Housewives* franchise. But Deborah Jermyn's *Sex and the City* and Greg Smith's *Beautiful TV: The Art and Argument of "Ally McBeal"* consider the gold-standard postfeminist shows.

Jermyn's addition to Wayne State's small-format TV Milestones series surveys the origins, textual history, and reception of *Sex and the City*. The book investigates and endorses the show's popularity; as Jermyn contends, "for millions of female viewers *SATC* was (and remains) part of the cultural fabric of everyday life, an aspirational 'brand' crystallizing a certain set of concerns and a kind of postfeminist identity they might engage with both through and beyond television" (6). The book has four chapters, which deal in turn with the show's production history; its original approach to comedy and sex; the characters and setting; and finally the show's legacy. Along the way, Jermyn acknowledges many of the questions that have lead to scholarly handwringing over the series. Is it fair to celebrate the lead characters as feminist exemplars when their search for male companionship looms so large? Is the show too resolutely heterosexual? Too white? And so on. Jermyn lacks the space, however, to respond in a comprehensive way to the contention that *Sex and the City* constitutes "feminism lite" or to thoroughly defend its focus on privileged representations of class, ethnicity, and sexual identity. As a result the book operates primarily as an introduction rather than a full analysis.

The first and most compelling chapter, "Making *Sex and the City*: Authorship and Ensemble Television Production," usefully problematizes the concept of the televisual auteur, employing the show to test theoretical claims. The chapter notes the multiple origins and contributing styles of *Sex and the City*, particularly Candace Bushnell's newspaper column, Darren Star's status as a producer and protégé of Aaron Spelling, HBO's self-conscious attempt to blur the lines between film and television, Sarah Jessica Parker's star image, and the costume design of Patricia Field. Chapter 2 looks at how *Sex and the City* used comedy to celebrate women who are honest (sometimes crassly so) about their sexual desires. Here Jermyn also responds to the assertion that the show is too narrowly focused on heterosexual coupling. She counters that *Sex and the City* positioned heterosexual women as each other's significant others, dramatizing how "homosocial life could coexist with the search for heterosexual sex and romance" (56). The third chapter has a strained, catch-all quality, grappling with such diverse topics as character archetypes, queer readings, ethnic diversity, and concluding with a discussion of the series' urban milieu and the city's notionally feminine identity.

It is understandable in the context of a book series concerned specifically with television that the decision was made not to delay publication to allow for discussion of the 2008 spin-off movie, which brings into renewed focus the conjunction of urban space, sexuality, and consumption ("Year after year," as Carrie's opening voiceover tells it, "twentysomething women come to New York City in search of the two Ls—labels and love"). But the decision does mean that Jermyn's book seems already somewhat dated. Since publication, the 2010 sequel film, *Sex and the City 2*, has also been released, though the film was less popular than its predecessor. Now not merely a postfeminist text but a postfeminist franchise, *Sex and the City* clearly deserves more thorough treatment, whereas Jermyn's brief study is necessarily constrained by the TV Milestones format. Her conclusion is thus sound but rather familiar: *Sex and the City* did "more than any other television text preceding it to push back the boundaries governing television's representation of sex and its exploration of female sexuality, language, and the intricacies of female friendship" (91–92).

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Christopher Nolan's *Inception*
David Fincher's *The Social Network*

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

See page 92 for more information about *Film Quarterly*

Greg Smith's *Beautiful TV* rejects the premise that a television show needs to be "directly, socially relevant" (2) in order to be fit for academic analysis. In a refreshing, if brash, denunciation of Cultural Studies scholarship, Smith heralds *Ally McBeal* for having expanded the formal and narrative devices of the medium. Believing that television is, as his title indicates, a beautiful art rather than an inferior one, Smith analyzes *Ally McBeal* aesthetically, noting in particular how the show changed the way that music and special effects are used in mainstream television. The discussion is not exclusively formalist, however, and *Beautiful TV* also delves into how *Ally McBeal* focuses debates about the workplace that are still ongoing. It is nevertheless the aesthetic analysis that is most surprising about this book. Such commentary represents a significant departure from other academic writing, which has tended to focus on the show's ambivalent presentation of feminism.

Smith is interested in the schematic way in which *Ally McBeal* differentiates between eccentric, imaginative characters and those who lack creative mindsets. The show valorizes introspection and individuality, a preference reflected, according to Smith, in its pop score (discussed in chapter 1), its special effects, voiceovers, and flashbacks (chapter 2), and its guest stars (chapter 4). As he writes in chapter 2 ("Practical Music, Personal Fantasy"), "In law, in love, in music, *Ally McBeal* argues that the dance is the way to be in the moment, to react, to bow to the power of discourse, but ultimately, to swing it to your own choices" (46).

Though it begins with strong insights and impeccable evidence, *Beautiful TV* falters when it turns to narration. The bloated narration chapter (which constitutes a whopping third of the book) painstakingly identifies each major character's history and attributes, arguing that they all either offset or magnify some aspect of Ally; one character, for example, is called the Nelle the "anti-Ally: she is entirely grounded in reality, focused solely on a career, scornful of emotionality, always assertive in love and business" (105). The trouble is that Smith has already summarized the characters more succinctly in previous chapters—as, for example, when he discusses Ally's boss, John Cage, whose channeling of Barry White affords him the sexual confidence he lacks. Their respective relationship to music identifies John as Ally's closest alter ego, yet Smith belabors this same point in the characterization chapter, concluding that "John is the character closest to Ally's idiosyncratic stance toward the world, but, like all the others, he falls short" (131).

Smith's strongest argument is, despite the terms of his opening polemic, arguably not aesthetic but cultural, for he persuasively illustrates that the show's representation of oddball behavior in the workplace encodes more politically sensitive questions of racial, ethnic, and sexual difference. As Smith points out, "in an era of touchy-feely narratives of acceptance, *Ally* reminds us that all acceptances are not equally easy" (160). Almost every case the show's law firm handles involves the changing nature of modern work, and in particular how gender and sexuality relate to power in the workplace. Observing this pattern brings Smith to a kind of consistent argument in *Ally McBeal*: though it is tempting to rely on legal process to pass judgment on thorny scenarios, "attitudes such as tolerance and respect cannot be legislated" (191). Smith mentions but does not address the potential conservatism of a position that advocates personal rather than institutional solutions to conflicts at work, yet he convincingly demonstrates how important this recurring topic is to *Ally McBeal*.

As these two books show, *Sex and the City* and *Ally McBeal* helped to define a postfeminist popular culture that is still pervasive today. The books usefully remind us of the daring and even groundbreaking aspects of these female-centered series—Jermyn emphasizes *Sex and the City's* celebration of female friendship, while Smith highlights *Ally McBeal*'s willingness to valorize interiority and trouble conventional narratives of workplace gender dynamics. These once novel concepts have today, however, fueled a postfeminist culture industry of sorts (*Lipstick Jungle* anyone?), a monstrous reproduction perhaps masked by the optimism of these two studies. © 2010 Suzanne Leonard

SUZANNE LEONARD is Assistant Professor of English at Simmons College and the author of *Fatal Attraction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

BOOK DATA Deborah Jermyn, *Sex and the City*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009. $14.95 paper. 128 pages.

Greg M. Smith, *Beautiful TV: The Art and Argument of "Ally McBeal."* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. $60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 286 pages.

LUCY FISCHER

Screening Sex by Linda Williams

Presence versus absence is a theme that has long reverberated in Linda Williams's work on sexuality and film, starting with her groundbreaking *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and "The Frenzy of the Visible"* (1989) where the pictorialization of the male genital in the throes of orgasm was counterpoised to the alleged unrepresentability of female pleasure. A similar dynamic structures *Screening Sex* which traces, historically and chronologically, cinematic acts of both revelation and concealment as they pertain to the visualization and acousticization of carnal acts of coupling. It is this paradox that Williams highlights in the book's very title, given that "screening" can mean both exhibiting and censoring.

In the same way that Williams began *Hard Core* with a discussion of "primitive" cinema (specifically Edweard Muybridge's "motion studies" of naked bodies), so her latest volume starts with Thomas Edison's peepshow movie *The Kiss* (1896). She reframes it from mere screen spectacle or theatrical quotation to screen sex, noting that "*The Kiss* is emblematic of a new kind of . . . voyeurism unleashed by moving pictures" (30). She later connects the Edison film to Andy Warhol's 1963 *Kiss* and to the fact that, in American cinema from the silent era through the 1950s, the kiss tended to be the erotic gesture that stood in, as synecdoche, for all others—given the rampant censorship of the movies.

Hence, Williams performs close readings of romantic scenes in such film classics as *Flesh and the Devil* (1926), *Tonight or Never* (1931), *Casablanca* (1942), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), and *Notorious* (1946)—noting taxonomically whether a kiss is "gentle" or "full-blooded," whether it is framed in profile for maximum visibility or shot over the shoulder, whether the man is "on top" or the woman. In a sense, her examination of such scenes reverberates with the kind of microanalysis sought by Muybridge in his atomization of human bodily movement. Throughout the book, Williams interrogates the relation of her observations to broader film theory. Thus in answer to the question of whether "we vicariously kiss" in watching the films mentioned above, she replies in the negative, speaking about how "one bodily sense translates into another, energies transmute and I experience a diffuse sensuality" (57).

Williams's use of the first-person pronoun in the sentence just quoted is important. Rather than hide behind the authorial "we" or speak in the dry academic language of "one," Williams sometimes talks quite personally about her own experiences watching some of the films she describes. For the most part she does this with certain iconic works that were released in the time of her early adulthood and became de rigueur for the culturally sophisticated—for example, *Deep Throat* (1972) or *Last Tango in Paris* (1972). She admits that both films "turned her on" in "ways [she] was not prepared for" (124)—indicating how screen sex can be simultaneously exciting and frightening, especially to the young.

To my mind Williams's autobiographical asides here are appropriate to the topic (in which the motives of the writer are questioned in a manner different from scholarship on other genres). Rather than trying to sanitize or absent herself, Williams acknowledges the strong effect of sexual explicitness on the viewer—be it critic or average spectator. Beyond this, her tackling of the topic seems to me a brave act—subject as it is to misunderstanding or dismissal (in the manner of the very films she investigates). Furthermore, her book is amply and graphically illustrated.

In a chapter on films of the 1960s, Williams investigates how U.S. cinema began to outgrow its "long adolescence" and to "go all the way" in sexual portrayals. Here, she focuses on *Carnal Knowledge* (1971) and *The Graduate* (1967), both directed by Mike Nichols, while noting the fact that foreign films like *The Virgin Spring* (1960) had already tackled such sexually shocking topics as rape. Williams points out how most American works of this era "seemed more comfortable talking about [sex] than showing it" (77) and also screened out erotic scenes or bracketed them as "interludes"—frequently layered with accompanying nondiegetic music. In contrast to Nichols's films were such Blaxploitation works as *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), which involved "naked black bodies engaged in (simulated) sex on parade" (95). The dichotomy between fake or "real" sex by actors has been an important division in the exhibition, categorization, censorship, and reception of films—with the latter mode generally reserved for hard-core pornography such as *Boys in the Sand* (1971). Here, again, Williams teases out the issues relevant to broader film theory, noting how André Bazin wrote: "To grant the novel the privilege of evoking everything, and yet to deny the cinema . . . the right of showing everything is a critical contradiction I note without resolving" (66).

In subsequent chapters, Williams analyzes topics ranging from Jane Fonda's cinematic career (through 1978) as a signpost for the "fate of the female orgasm in mainstream Hollywood film" (156) to Oshima's *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), in her view a groundbreaking (but rather singular) example of the pornographic art film. Her subsequent foci include the "primal scenes on American screens" (216) in such works as *Blue Velvet* (1986) or *Brokeback Mountain*

(2005), in which voyeurism plays a central role, and the more adventurous foreign contemporary "hard core art film," perhaps best exemplified by French director Catherine Breillat's numerous films, including *Romance* (1999) and *Fat Girl* (2001).

After a chapter on the fate of American hard core, Williams ends with a fascinating consideration of how pornographic cinema and other visual imagery are transformed by the Internet and the "home theater"—asking (in relation to screens), "Does size matter?" (300). While in the public space of the theater the masturbatory dynamic of pornography is somewhat contained (on the part of the spectator, at least)—at home it is assumed to be the raison d'être and set free. Here she discusses cable TV pornography, Internet porn, and computerized interactive sex sites, arguing with notions that the digital or virtual worlds "disembody" the viewer.

In sum, this is an insightful, articulate, and honest volume that gives serious thought to a subject that challenges the tenets of distanced, scholarly discourse. © 2010 Lucy Fischer

LUCY FISCHER is Distinguished Professor of Film Studies and English at the University of Pittsburgh, where she directs the Film Studies program. She is the author of eight books, the latest being *American Cinema of the 1920s: Themes and Variations* (Rutgers University Press, 2009).

BOOK DATA Linda Williams, *Screening Sex*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. $94.95 cloth; $25.95 paper. 424 pages.

JOANNA E. RAPF

Machine-Age Comedy by Michael North

Michael North's erudite, playful, and challenging *Machine-Age Comedy* inaugurates a new series on Modernist Literature and Culture from Oxford University Press. Presented in two parts as a series of interrelated case studies, the book is well illustrated and arranged in roughly chronological order, beginning with a skillful juxtaposition of Buster Keaton's *The Cameraman* (1928) and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and aptly concluding with a dense chapter on James Foster Wallace's even denser novel, *Infinite Jest* (1996).

The second chapter, "Mickey's Mechanical Man," is devoted to Walt Disney. Walter Benjamin, whose "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935) North cites extensively in his introduction, was a serious Disney fan, and Disney and Keaton were similarly drawn to filmmaking because of its technological challenges.

Because animation is both practically and conceptually dependent on mechanical reproduction, it not only flourished with the Fleischers and then Disney, but it appealed to artists such as Rube Goldberg and Marcel Duchamp, about whom North writes in the third chapter, cleverly entitled "Goldberg Variations." Both men, he suggests, shared a satirical perspective on what he calls "the machine age." With Goldberg, "the joke made at the expense of the machine is also quite literally a machine as well" (96). Duchamp's "readymades," in juxtaposition, seem to put the mechanical in a kind of punning relationship with the human. Like many of the Cubist pioneers with whom he associated, Duchamp, North intimates, was influenced by Henri Bergson, whose *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, first published in 1899, was in its tenth edition by 1913.

Bergson's theories were the key theoretical link between modernity, the mechanical, and comedy, particularly his argument that laughter is caused by "the mechanical encrusted on the living." North reminds us that for Bergson "inauthentic, machinelike behavior prompts laughter . . . because it violates our faith in the essential flexibility of human nature, which is what distinguishes us from inorganic matter in the first place" (154). But elsewhere in the book, North does not always make clear when Bergson is talking about laughter and when about comedy in general. Indeed, if there is one serious flaw in the otherwise ingenious arguments that weave throughout the chapters of *Machine-Age Comedy*, it is that such key terms as "laughter," "comedy," "humor," and "satire" are not always differentiated or defined.

In part 1, with Vertov, Keaton, Disney, Goldberg, and Duchamp, North discusses artists who exploit the link between the mechanical and comic satirically, and satire is a type of comedy that suggests the possibility of reform. The vision of these artists is critical, but playful. Part 2 is darker. With Wyndham Lewis, Samuel Beckett, and finally David Foster Wallace, we're in the world of black comedy, an attitude that uses an ironic and biting intelligence to attack sentimentality, social conventions, and an apparently absurd and meaningless universe. For Wyndham Lewis, North tells us that laughter has no corrective function (as it does for Henri Bergson), since "human beings lack the power to change" (118). Discussing Lewis as both author and painter, he concludes that his "anger and discomfort at his own laughable state represent a final inability to believe there is any way out of the comic situation" (140).

"No way out"—the very idea evokes Samuel Beckett, and North gives a welcome and full reading of *Film* (1965), ingeniously connecting this work with his earlier discussions of Vertov and Keaton, since Keaton stars in this Beckett–Schneider production which was shot by Vertov's brother, Boris Kaufman. And indeed, both *Man with a Movie Camera*

(2005), in which voyeurism plays a central role, and the more adventurous foreign contemporary "hard core art film," perhaps best exemplified by French director Catherine Breillat's numerous films, including *Romance* (1999) and *Fat Girl* (2001).

After a chapter on the fate of American hard core, Williams ends with a fascinating consideration of how pornographic cinema and other visual imagery are transformed by the Internet and the "home theater"—asking (in relation to screens), "Does size matter?" (300). While in the public space of the theater the masturbatory dynamic of pornography is somewhat contained (on the part of the spectator, at least)—at home it is assumed to be the raison d'être and set free. Here she discusses cable TV pornography, Internet porn, and computerized interactive sex sites, arguing with notions that the digital or virtual worlds "disembody" the viewer.

In sum, this is an insightful, articulate, and honest volume that gives serious thought to a subject that challenges the tenets of distanced, scholarly discourse. © 2010 Lucy Fischer

LUCY FISCHER is Distinguished Professor of Film Studies and English at the University of Pittsburgh, where she directs the Film Studies program. She is the author of eight books, the latest being *American Cinema of the 1920s: Themes and Variations* (Rutgers University Press, 2009).

BOOK DATA Linda Williams, *Screening Sex*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. $94.95 cloth; $25.95 paper. 424 pages.

JOANNA E. RAPF

Machine-Age Comedy by Michael North

Michael North's erudite, playful, and challenging *Machine-Age Comedy* inaugurates a new series on Modernist Literature and Culture from Oxford University Press. Presented in two parts as a series of interrelated case studies, the book is well illustrated and arranged in roughly chronological order, beginning with a skillful juxtaposition of Buster Keaton's *The Cameraman* (1928) and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and aptly concluding with a dense chapter on James Foster Wallace's even denser novel, *Infinite Jest* (1996).

The second chapter, "Mickey's Mechanical Man," is devoted to Walt Disney. Walter Benjamin, whose "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935) North cites extensively in his introduction, was a serious Disney fan, and Disney and Keaton were similarly drawn to filmmaking because of its technological challenges.

Because animation is both practically and conceptually dependent on mechanical reproduction, it not only flourished with the Fleischers and then Disney, but it appealed to artists such as Rube Goldberg and Marcel Duchamp, about whom North writes in the third chapter, cleverly entitled "Goldberg Variations." Both men, he suggests, shared a satirical perspective on what he calls "the machine age." With Goldberg, "the joke made at the expense of the machine is also quite literally a machine as well" (96). Duchamp's "readymades," in juxtaposition, seem to put the mechanical in a kind of punning relationship with the human. Like many of the Cubist pioneers with whom he associated, Duchamp, North intimates, was influenced by Henri Bergson, whose *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, first published in 1899, was in its tenth edition by 1913.

Bergson's theories were the key theoretical link between modernity, the mechanical, and comedy, particularly his argument that laughter is caused by "the mechanical encrusted on the living." North reminds us that for Bergson "inauthentic, machinelike behavior prompts laughter . . . because it violates our faith in the essential flexibility of human nature, which is what distinguishes us from inorganic matter in the first place" (154). But elsewhere in the book, North does not always make clear when Bergson is talking about laughter and when about comedy in general. Indeed, if there is one serious flaw in the otherwise ingenious arguments that weave throughout the chapters of *Machine-Age Comedy*, it is that such key terms as "laughter," "comedy," "humor," and "satire" are not always differentiated or defined.

In part 1, with Vertov, Keaton, Disney, Goldberg, and Duchamp, North discusses artists who exploit the link between the mechanical and comic satirically, and satire is a type of comedy that suggests the possibility of reform. The vision of these artists is critical, but playful. Part 2 is darker. With Wyndham Lewis, Samuel Beckett, and finally David Foster Wallace, we're in the world of black comedy, an attitude that uses an ironic and biting intelligence to attack sentimentality, social conventions, and an apparently absurd and meaningless universe. For Wyndham Lewis, North tells us that laughter has no corrective function (as it does for Henri Bergson), since "human beings lack the power to change" (118). Discussing Lewis as both author and painter, he concludes that his "anger and discomfort at his own laughable state represent a final inability to believe there is any way out of the comic situation" (140).

"No way out"—the very idea evokes Samuel Beckett, and North gives a welcome and full reading of *Film* (1965), ingeniously connecting this work with his earlier discussions of Vertov and Keaton, since Keaton stars in this Beckett–Schneider production which was shot by Vertov's brother, Boris Kaufman. And indeed, both *Man with a Movie Camera*

and *Film* do utilize a close identification between the human eye and the camera eye, but Beckett's work is ultimately more pessimistic, even anti-human, asking how we can "rid ourselves of ourselves" (153). Playing with Bishop Berkeley's *esse est percipi*, Beckett pushes the rational to the point of the irrational, coming to a kind of extralogical conclusion that makes his work, according to North, a powerful example of machine-age comedy.

Writing on the far side of postmodernism, Wallace, in *Infinite Jest*, takes to an even further extreme the pessimism of Lewis and Beckett, where every activity in his convoluted novel follows the same pattern: "An initial desire for fun, freedom, or even just change leads ironically to repetition, routine, machine dependency, and sometimes death" (174). "Ironically" is a bitter adverb here, for North seems to have written this chapter before Wallace's own death by suicide in 2008.

Machine-Age Comedy is an intriguing book, a mosaic of ideas, connecting a diverse group of twentieth-century artists through their fascination with the mechanical. North ends with Chaplin and *Modern Times* (1936). The film, he concludes, is "the definitive machine-age comedy" through its "wholesale repudiation of the machine," including the camera (188). Unlike Vertov, Keaton, Goldberg, or Duchamp, who were really interested in the machine, Chaplin saw its limitations and dangers. And unlike Lewis, Beckett, or Wallace, Chaplin may roller-skate on the precipice of darkness, but he does not succumb to it. The images in this film, such as the Rube Goldberg-like feeding machine or the assembly line that resembles an animation filmstrip, do sum up much of what North has examined in the artists he has used in this book to define "machine-age comedy." But Chaplin alone, of these men, celebrates spontaneity, what Bergson called "the essential flexibility of human nature," and defies the repetition, both mechanical and human, that is at the heart of twentieth-century laughter. © 2010 Joanna E. Rapf

JOANNA E. RAPF is Professor of English and Film and Video Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

BOOK DATA Michael North, *Machine-Age Comedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. $99.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 232 pages.

CHARLIE KEIL

Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema by Dan Streible

Dan Streible's *Fight Pictures* is an authoritative, near-exhaustive account of how the worlds of organized sport and early cinema intersected at a crucial time in the development of each, establishing a model for the ways media could shape the nature of public sporting events. Interested mainly in the production and reception contexts of these films, Streible uses the vibrant twenty-year period of boxing's initial appearances on celluloid to argue persuasively that the "film industry, boxing world, and theatrical business . . . inhabited a common sociological world" (49). He shows how the contested and intertwined domains of prizefighting and cinema revealed faultlines in early twentieth-century America, stoking controversy, tantalizing audiences, and straining race relations.

From the outset, Streible makes a strong case for why and how boxing became the sport most consistently aligned with moving pictures when the medium emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. Most obviously, prizefights' confined space and short bursts of regulated action lent themselves particularly well to the limited resources of early films. Streible succinctly characterizes the affinity as a "match of two practices that relied on brief, segmented units of performance" (23). In keeping with the emphasis on context over text, Streible stresses how both boxing and cinema emerged out of a male urban milieu in which commercial entertainments were vigorously promoted. Heavyweight champions like "Gentleman" Jim Corbett parlayed their success in boxing into appearances at venues as varied as the Folies Bergère and the World's Fair. Successful prizefighters became celebrities ready to benefit from the mass circulation of their images and achievements that cinema could offer. Key boxing promoters did not limit themselves to the realm of sport, moving freely from managing fights to setting up theatrical tours and producing films. Thus, as Streible shows, cinema and boxing existed in a mutually advantageous relationship that fostered interest in both, though that relationship was tested by social censure and government intervention.

Streible discusses fight films in relation to key issues in the study of early cinema. In his chapter (subtitled "Women at the Veriscope") on the 1897 James J. Corbett–Bob Fitzsimmons heavyweight contest in Carson City, Nevada, billed at the time as "The Fight of the Century," he concludes that female viewers' enthusiasm for early projections of prizefights may have been overstated by historians. The spotty documentation available and the inevitable distortions inherent in the contemporaneous promotional material that reported the attendance of so-called "matinee girls" at screenings must temper any reading of this example as an early occasion of female scopic desire (as Charles Musser and Miriam Hansen, among others, have claimed). Later, in the engrossing chapter on fake fight films, Streible contends that Siegmund Lubin's notoriety as the chief purveyor of reenactments derives to a large degree from anti-Semitism because piracy and

and *Film* do utilize a close identification between the human eye and the camera eye, but Beckett's work is ultimately more pessimistic, even anti-human, asking how we can "rid ourselves of ourselves" (153). Playing with Bishop Berkeley's *esse est percipi*, Beckett pushes the rational to the point of the irrational, coming to a kind of extralogical conclusion that makes his work, according to North, a powerful example of machine-age comedy.

Writing on the far side of postmodernism, Wallace, in *Infinite Jest*, takes to an even further extreme the pessimism of Lewis and Beckett, where every activity in his convoluted novel follows the same pattern: "An initial desire for fun, freedom, or even just change leads ironically to repetition, routine, machine dependency, and sometimes death" (174). "Ironically" is a bitter adverb here, for North seems to have written this chapter before Wallace's own death by suicide in 2008.

Machine-Age Comedy is an intriguing book, a mosaic of ideas, connecting a diverse group of twentieth-century artists through their fascination with the mechanical. North ends with Chaplin and *Modern Times* (1936). The film, he concludes, is "the definitive machine-age comedy" through its "wholesale repudiation of the machine," including the camera (188). Unlike Vertov, Keaton, Goldberg, or Duchamp, who were really interested in the machine, Chaplin saw its limitations and dangers. And unlike Lewis, Beckett, or Wallace, Chaplin may roller-skate on the precipice of darkness, but he does not succumb to it. The images in this film, such as the Rube Goldberg-like feeding machine or the assembly line that resembles an animation filmstrip, do sum up much of what North has examined in the artists he has used in this book to define "machine-age comedy." But Chaplin alone, of these men, celebrates spontaneity, what Bergson called "the essential flexibility of human nature," and defies the repetition, both mechanical and human, that is at the heart of twentieth-century laughter. © 2010 Joanna E. Rapf

JOANNA E. RAPF is Professor of English and Film and Video Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

BOOK DATA Michael North, *Machine-Age Comedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. $99.00 cloth; $27.95 paper. 232 pages.

CHARLIE KEIL

Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema by Dan Streible

Dan Streible's *Fight Pictures* is an authoritative, near-exhaustive account of how the worlds of organized sport and early cinema intersected at a crucial time in the development of each, establishing a model for the ways media could shape the nature of public sporting events. Interested mainly in the production and reception contexts of these films, Streible uses the vibrant twenty-year period of boxing's initial appearances on celluloid to argue persuasively that the "film industry, boxing world, and theatrical business . . . inhabited a common sociological world" (49). He shows how the contested and intertwined domains of prizefighting and cinema revealed faultlines in early twentieth-century America, stoking controversy, tantalizing audiences, and straining race relations.

From the outset, Streible makes a strong case for why and how boxing became the sport most consistently aligned with moving pictures when the medium emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. Most obviously, prizefights' confined space and short bursts of regulated action lent themselves particularly well to the limited resources of early films. Streible succinctly characterizes the affinity as a "match of two practices that relied on brief, segmented units of performance" (23). In keeping with the emphasis on context over text, Streible stresses how both boxing and cinema emerged out of a male urban milieu in which commercial entertainments were vigorously promoted. Heavyweight champions like "Gentleman" Jim Corbett parlayed their success in boxing into appearances at venues as varied as the Folies Bergère and the World's Fair. Successful prizefighters became celebrities ready to benefit from the mass circulation of their images and achievements that cinema could offer. Key boxing promoters did not limit themselves to the realm of sport, moving freely from managing fights to setting up theatrical tours and producing films. Thus, as Streible shows, cinema and boxing existed in a mutually advantageous relationship that fostered interest in both, though that relationship was tested by social censure and government intervention.

Streible discusses fight films in relation to key issues in the study of early cinema. In his chapter (subtitled "Women at the Veriscope") on the 1897 James J. Corbett–Bob Fitzsimmons heavyweight contest in Carson City, Nevada, billed at the time as "The Fight of the Century," he concludes that female viewers' enthusiasm for early projections of prizefights may have been overstated by historians. The spotty documentation available and the inevitable distortions inherent in the contemporaneous promotional material that reported the attendance of so-called "matinee girls" at screenings must temper any reading of this example as an early occasion of female scopic desire (as Charles Musser and Miriam Hansen, among others, have claimed). Later, in the engrossing chapter on fake fight films, Streible contends that Siegmund Lubin's notoriety as the chief purveyor of reenactments derives to a large degree from anti-Semitism because piracy and

fakery were rampant in the industry from the outset, and hardly the sole province of this immigrant manufacturer. By establishing that fakery defined the landscape of entertainment at this time, Streible's work here helps reinforce Tom Gunning's contention that the early cinema spectator approached the trickery of film with an enthusiasm borne out of a longstanding delight in traditions of illusionism.

In his extended account of the Jack Johnson era, Streible shows how legal constraints on the interstate traffic of fight films functioned to contain the threat that Johnson's dominance in the ring posed to myths of white supremacy. The medium's persuasiveness as a documentary record underscored the irrefutability of Johnson's victories: while films of his bouts roused black audiences to new levels of race pride, they only fueled anxiety for much of white America, prompting 1912 legislation that banned the interstate transport of fight films.

Streible compellingly justifies the downplaying of the pictures of his book's title in favor of sporting culture. Only a small percentage of the films still exist, for example, and they often tend to be shot from such a distance that the action is hard to decipher. For Streible, fight films' true significance resides in the impact they had on their various publics. And yet it is hard to deny that what the films show—the fighters actually trading blows—was a major part of their appeal for audiences. Given the constraints of early cinema, no other sport would prove as appealing to early filmmakers or filmgoers, though of course later American cinema (and, in due course, television) would much better capture pugilism. Silent, black-and-white images of boxing matches could not record the noise of the crowd, the smell of the ring, and the shock caused by spurts of brightly colored blood. Furthermore, as Streible points out, "the imagery in surviving fight films carries no hint of the vast interest and controversy that surrounded them" (290). All the more reason, then, to appreciate *Fight Pictures*, which resurrects and analyzes that interest and controversy with great skill. © 2010 Charlie Keil

CHARLIE KEIL is Director of the Cinema Studies Institute and Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of Toronto. His most recent publication is *American Cinema of the 1910s* (Rutgers University Press, 2009), co-edited with Ben Singer.

BOOK DATA Dan Streible, *Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. $65.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 424 pages.

MARTIN FRADLEY

Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema by Geoff King

The low-budget independent feature film and the vast multimedia conglomerates that now dominate the American film industry may seem at first glance to be unlikely bedfellows. As Geoff King demonstrates, however, the partnership between the "indie" scene and corporate business is one of the major industrial trends in recent U.S. cinema. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, specialty studio subsidiaries—Focus Features, Fox Searchlight, Miramax, Paramount Classics, Warner Independent Pictures—started to bankroll aesthetically unconventional, edgy features such as *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) and *Adaptation* (2002) in the hope of appealing to hip filmgoers. "Indiewood" attempted to bridge the commercial mainstream and the alternative, left-field cultural scene, more or less explicitly seeking to repeat the success of the post-*Easy Rider* (1969) "Hollywood Renaissance" three decades earlier.

Geoff King's *Indiewood, USA* offers a careful and sober analysis of the trend, stressing from the outset that it is "an industrial/commercial phenomenon" that is best understood "within the wider context of certain tendencies in contemporary cultural production in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century capitalism" (2). In the neoliberal marketplace King describes, the very notion of independence in American cinema has become increasingly nebulous and highly contested. Peter Biskind previously underscored this point in his characteristically polemical *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance and the Rise of Independent Film* (Simon and Schuster, 2004), a volume which has become a benchmark for the committed cultural pessimist. A number of other books take a less trenchant approach to the subject, including King's own earlier work, *American Independent Cinema* (I. B. Tauris, 2005), and two anthologies: *American Independent Cinema: A Sight and Sound Reader* (BFI Publishing, 2001), edited by Jim Hillier, and *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (Routledge, 2004), edited by Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt. Yet few would dissent entirely from the analysis that indie movies have, ever since Miramax was absorbed into the Disney empire in 1993, become increasingly conservative and formulaic. Paradoxically, then, "independent" has become a euphemism for a compromised quasi-autonomy—a niche-marketing concept

fakery were rampant in the industry from the outset, and hardly the sole province of this immigrant manufacturer. By establishing that fakery defined the landscape of entertainment at this time, Streible's work here helps reinforce Tom Gunning's contention that the early cinema spectator approached the trickery of film with an enthusiasm borne out of a longstanding delight in traditions of illusionism.

In his extended account of the Jack Johnson era, Streible shows how legal constraints on the interstate traffic of fight films functioned to contain the threat that Johnson's dominance in the ring posed to myths of white supremacy. The medium's persuasiveness as a documentary record underscored the irrefutability of Johnson's victories: while films of his bouts roused black audiences to new levels of race pride, they only fueled anxiety for much of white America, prompting 1912 legislation that banned the interstate transport of fight films.

Streible compellingly justifies the downplaying of the pictures of his book's title in favor of sporting culture. Only a small percentage of the films still exist, for example, and they often tend to be shot from such a distance that the action is hard to decipher. For Streible, fight films' true significance resides in the impact they had on their various publics. And yet it is hard to deny that what the films show—the fighters actually trading blows—was a major part of their appeal for audiences. Given the constraints of early cinema, no other sport would prove as appealing to early filmmakers or filmgoers, though of course later American cinema (and, in due course, television) would much better capture pugilism. Silent, black-and-white images of boxing matches could not record the noise of the crowd, the smell of the ring, and the shock caused by spurts of brightly colored blood. Furthermore, as Streible points out, "the imagery in surviving fight films carries no hint of the vast interest and controversy that surrounded them" (290). All the more reason, then, to appreciate *Fight Pictures*, which resurrects and analyzes that interest and controversy with great skill. © 2010 Charlie Keil

CHARLIE KEIL is Director of the Cinema Studies Institute and Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of Toronto. His most recent publication is *American Cinema of the 1910s* (Rutgers University Press, 2009), co-edited with Ben Singer.

BOOK DATA Dan Streible, *Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. $65.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 424 pages.

MARTIN FRADLEY

Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema by Geoff King

The low-budget independent feature film and the vast multimedia conglomerates that now dominate the American film industry may seem at first glance to be unlikely bedfellows. As Geoff King demonstrates, however, the partnership between the "indie" scene and corporate business is one of the major industrial trends in recent U.S. cinema. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, specialty studio subsidiaries—Focus Features, Fox Searchlight, Miramax, Paramount Classics, Warner Independent Pictures—started to bankroll aesthetically unconventional, edgy features such as *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) and *Adaptation* (2002) in the hope of appealing to hip filmgoers. "Indiewood" attempted to bridge the commercial mainstream and the alternative, left-field cultural scene, more or less explicitly seeking to repeat the success of the post-*Easy Rider* (1969) "Hollywood Renaissance" three decades earlier.

Geoff King's *Indiewood, USA* offers a careful and sober analysis of the trend, stressing from the outset that it is "an industrial/commercial phenomenon" that is best understood "within the wider context of certain tendencies in contemporary cultural production in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century capitalism" (2). In the neoliberal marketplace King describes, the very notion of independence in American cinema has become increasingly nebulous and highly contested. Peter Biskind previously underscored this point in his characteristically polemical *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance and the Rise of Independent Film* (Simon and Schuster, 2004), a volume which has become a benchmark for the committed cultural pessimist. A number of other books take a less trenchant approach to the subject, including King's own earlier work, *American Independent Cinema* (I. B. Tauris, 2005), and two anthologies: *American Independent Cinema: A Sight and Sound Reader* (BFI Publishing, 2001), edited by Jim Hillier, and *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (Routledge, 2004), edited by Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt. Yet few would dissent entirely from the analysis that indie movies have, ever since Miramax was absorbed into the Disney empire in 1993, become increasingly conservative and formulaic. Paradoxically, then, "independent" has become a euphemism for a compromised quasi-autonomy—a niche-marketing concept

rather than a designation for work that genuinely exists outside the corporate and cultural mainstream.

King tracks this somewhat dispiriting history through careful analysis of the contribution of individuals (Quentin Tarantino, Charlie Kaufman, Steven Soderbergh), the significance of specific films (*Being John Malkovich* [1999], *Traffic* [2000], *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* [2004]), and the distinctive brand identities of the studio subsidiary companies. He draws heavily upon Pierre Bourdieu's influential work on class-based hierarchies of taste and cultural "distinction." As King explains, a key part of this process is "the commodification of cultural products understood (or constructed) as alternative to the mainstream in a manner that is experienced or sold as 'hip' and 'cool'" (15). In this way, he argues, contemporary indies such as *Juno* (2007) or Tarantino's prepackaged "cult" films are carefully marketed as possessing an alternative cultural cachet and "existing in some kind of opposition to the mainstream" (15). In distinguishing their products from standard multiplex entertainment, this deceptive aura of "oppositionality" is, in King's analysis, central to the commercial logic and brand identities of the subsidiary studio divisions.

There is plenty to admire about *Indiewood, USA*, not least in terms of its extremely detailed and persuasive case studies. King's overarching thesis is that films such as *Far from Heaven* (2002) or *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) are fundamentally conventional, providing only "twists or variations on established norms that offer particular pleasures or sources of potential distinction-marking on the part of the viewer" (236). Contemporary indies are conceived, produced, and marketed in such a way as to appeal to the cultural narcissism—my term, not King's—of their target demographic: the college-educated, mainly white and middle-class viewers who use such media entertainments to feel differentiated from the multiplex hordes. The dynamics of such cultural distinction are concisely encapsulated by a scene in *Lost in Translation* (2003) in which Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson)—a thoughtful, demure philosophy graduate—is contrasted with a vacuous Hollywood starlet (Anna Farris). The viewer is left in no doubt as to which character serves as "the cinematic pole opposite to that which [Sofia] Coppola's film wishes to be associated" (254).

Elsewhere, there is a forceful assessment of the political limitations of *Three Kings* and *American Beauty* (both 1999), the latter justly taken to task for the way it sanitizes would-be oppositional politics. As King suggests, Sam Mendes's film "is based on a self-affirming romantic individualism in tune with a long-standing thread of American ideology that offers no meaningful prescription for social change" (213). As critically succinct as King is at this juncture, one does not have to read too deeply between the lines to detect an underlying air of cynicism—and King's belated valorization of Todd Solondz's nihilistic black comedies is arguably symptomatic in this regard. It is easy to pithily summarize *21 Grams* (2003) as a "[m]elodramatic tragedy/romance marked by complex multi-strand-narrative articulation and hyper-realist stylized visuals" (244), but this hardly accounts for the real affective force of the movie. In many ways *Indiewood, USA* offers a precise historical poetics of "independent" filmmaking as it stands today, but often King's book reads unhelpfully like a volume written by someone who has simply lost faith in contemporary American cinema. © 2010 Martin Fradley

MARTIN FRADLEY is currently editing a book about British filmmaker Shane Meadows.

BOOK DATA Geoff King, *Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2009. $89.00 cloth; $29.00 paper. 294 pages.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION, 09/30/10

Title: *Film Quarterly* Pub. No. 190-480. Frequency: Four issues published annually. Subscription price: $204.00 institutions. Location of office of publication: 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, Alameda County, CA 94704. Headquarters of publishers: 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720-5812. Publisher: University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720-5812. Editor: Rob White, c/o UC Press, 2000 Center St., Ste. 303, Berkeley CA 94704. Owner: Regents of the University of California, c/o University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720-1012. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding twelve months.

Extent and nature of circulation	Average number copies each issue for preceding twelve months	Actual number copies for single issue nearest to filing date
Total number of copies printed	3425	3570
Paid outside county mail subs	1287	1202
Paid distribution outside the mails	1600	1563
Total paid circulation	2887	2765
Free distribution outside the mails	129	157
Total distribution	3016	2922
Copies not distributed	410	648
Total	3425	3570
Percent Pd. and/or Requested Circ.	95.73%	94.63%

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.
Rebecca Simon, Director

CAHIERS JAUNES

Many moons ago, as a neophyte tutor in film studies at Harvard, I found myself preparing a course on Renoir. I remember repairing to the stacks in Widener Library to read what the critics in *Cahiers du cinéma* had said about Renoir. The critics in question were a generation quite unprecedented in the history of cinema—Godard, Truffaut, Rohmer, Chabrol, Rivette, referred to by both Emilie Bickerton in *A Short History of "Cahiers du cinéma"* and Richard Brody in *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* as "the Hitchcocko-Hawksians"—Young Turks who all envisaged themselves as future directors as well as *cinéastes*. While these may have been biding their time as critics at *Cahiers*, I can personally attest that they were not wasting it. (Godard wrote about film for ten years before being able to make *Breathless*.) What the Hitchcocko-Hawksian generation had to say about Renoir fairly leapt off the page. These are people who knew their Renoir inside out and backwards. (Truffaut boasted of having seen *Rules of the Game* twenty times.) To this day I fail to understand why many of these incandescent writings still remain uncollected and untranslated.

What Bickerton and Brody emphasize and bring to the fore is that, on the one hand, when the first generation of *Cahiers* critics moved into filmmaking, "the New Wave they created ensured the magazine's place in history" (Bickerton, 29), and that, on the other hand, *Cahiers* never really recovered from their departure. While it did not lack for gifted editors and writers, these did not succeed in halting a long-term decline. The paradoxes here run deep, and Bickerton's book—a threnody—makes depressing reading.

It is for example nothing short of shocking that "*Cahiers* had nothing to say about cinema in 1973 . . . In Germany, Fassbinder—a devotee of *Cahiers*' canon who dedicated his first film to Chabrol, Rohmer and Straub—had already made ten extraordinary films that drew a portrait of contemporary German society using a mixture of Brecht, Sirk, and the New Wave; in India Satyajit Ray had long since completed his Apu trilogy; a strong body of work was emanating from the Senegalese Ousmane Sembène; Tarkovsky's work was in full genesis; Bergman was entering his late phase, while from the saturated and beautiful *Oedipus Rex* and sober atheism of *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pasolini's work (and shortly afterwards, his life) would come to an abrupt and shocking end with *Salò*. There was little trace of [any of] this in *Cahiers*" (83), even though a few years earlier it would commonly have been regarded as a paramount film journal. What had gone wrong? Could it not still be rectified, put to rights?

Bickerton indicates that what "*Cahiers* faced in the 1980s was the unprecedented dilemma of having to deal with a film culture and criticism that had fully internalized the *Cahiers* ideas and arguments." *Cahiers* had in a sense become the victim of its own success. "The canonization of early Hollywood, the new wave of film-making, the theorization of film criticism and ideological readings: all have had direct impact on the subsequent generations of directors, often highly knowledgeable about movie history and self-conscious successors of the old masters. *Cahiers* [by the 1980s, and even earlier] needed to deal with a domain that had become, thanks partly to its teachgs, fully self-aware. It ducked the challenge, preferring to treat film as a product that could sell magazines" (133). By 2001, there was a "vast coverage of *Apocalypse Now Redux* and *Pearl Harbour* in the same issue, one that could only find a few short lines about Rivette's *Va savoir*" (110). Things had come to a pretty pass. This is a *trahison des clercs* if ever there was one. More fundamentally, *Cahiers* in its heyday—the yellow years, as Bickerton calls them (her book, nicely, sports a cover of the original *Cahiers* yellow) "invented, and compellingly deployed—before embodying and reinventing it in the New Wave—one notion that remains integral to any critical engagement with cinema: the *auteur*. Today, the scattergun use of this term might at first appear to confirm the magazine's long-lasting influence, yet it reveals a bitter victory. The concept itself has been voided of meaning." Indeed, she goes on, in France a director "must claim this title even before making a film so as to be eligible for funding" (143–44).

But even prior to this cheapening, the concern became that "*Cahiers* would become a mere organ of the New Wave" (36) and that this derogation would undermine its authority. In this way a hands-off attitude to the New Wave directors grew up within *Cahiers*. (Rivette, who took over its editorship when Bazin died, was particularly reticent, even though the New Wave directors—as Rivette surely must have known—needed all the help they could get.) The distancing was, admittedly, not uniform. Godard fared better, and Truffaut much worse, than the others. Jean-Louis Comolli, who replaced Rivette as

Film Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2, pps 90–91 ISSN 0015-1386, electronic ISSN 1533-8630. © 2010 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI: 10.1525/FQ.2010.64.2.90

editor, wrote perceptively about Godard; and in general, "seeking a reconciliation with Godard" was, according to Brody, the "key to explaining *Cahiers*' red turn" (79). Yet the New Wave directors at large "had tended to accept a compromise: to make films on their own terms meant making cinema for a minority public. It was a major shift from their early aim [as critics] to suppress the opposition between art films for the few and popular movies for the masses" (Bickerton, 58).

Richard Brody is no less sensitive than Bickerton to the paradoxes involved here. The Young Turks between the yellow covers, having used *Cahiers* "as a base from which to launch their assault on the citadel of the French cinema" (23)—and having in the process "changed the way that the French, and indeed the world, thought about movies"—had no way of knowing that "the rise of the New Wave" would coincide "with the demise of the studio system" (171), which meant the end of the American cinema as "an aesthetic wellspring" (179). As Godard himself once put it, "At the moment that we can do cinema, we can no longer do the kind of cinema that gave us the desire to do it" (123). *Cahiers* thus became "a point of departure, a lost paradise" (123). Even so, Godard "up to his exhibition at the Pompidou in 1973," to quote Bickerton again, "mourned the death of cinema whilst simultaneously breathing new life into it with every project" (137), a judgment with which Brody would surely concur. But both writers are uncomfortably aware of the price that had to be paid. By the time Godard discovered video, teamed up with Anne-Marie Miéville, and moved to Grenoble then to Rolle, in Switzerland (where he still lives), he was also "heading in the direction of high art at a moment when even serious viewers were, more than ever, in thrall to the popular" (Brody, 431). Godard's undoubted prestige was "out of step with the mood in France" (454). Nor do the poignancies, the ambiguities of his position end here. Godard "had a fierce desire for intellectual discussion" (583), Brody points out. "He was the model of the intellectual filmmaker in the eyes of moviegoers and critics, but for professional intellectuals he remained an aesthete." Indeed, the "process that the *Cahiers* writers had helped to crystallize—the celebration of the director's personality through the recognition of its distinctive imprint on his films—was turned around by Godard. With other filmmakers, the film came first, followed by the recognition of the auteur's personality; with Godard, the person came first" (65), and this can become tiresome.

Brody's lengthy survey of Godard's extended career is more carefully written than Bickerton's much shorter history of *Cahiers*, but it is not free from digressions, tangents, and longueurs. But then again it is a secret known only to the entire world that Godard's films (or some of them, at least) have longueurs of their own. Brody's book makes up for his by bristling with barbed insights about individual films that do much to explain why Godard and *Cahiers* could never quite let go of each other, even if Godard for his part kept his distance until 1979, when (as Bickerton relates) he and Miéville accepted an invitation to edit the 300th issue of *Cahiers*.

A few examples of Brody's well-judged insights must needs suffice here. "In appearing amateurish [*Breathless*] calls attention to then codes of professionalism, and in the end highlights the fact that they are merely conventions: it denaturalizes them" (69); "Godard wanted [*A Woman is a Woman*] to be not realistic but real. He was not interested in constructing a set that *resembled* an apartment; rather, he wanted to film in a place that *was* an apartment (or a replica of one)" (111). The film "is constructed as a collage of its footage," Brody goes on, featuring "images that are not so much disconnected as simply unconnected, as well as breaks and jumps in sound that are as essential as those of the image" (114). Note if you will the complex aesthetic here: "while for Bazin reality was the touchstone of the cinema, for Godard the cinema was the touchstone of reality" (90). In *Alphaville*, "Godard used the movie camera as a scientific instrument, attempting to put his faith not in the way things appeared but in what filming them might reveal" (230). Hence the shooting at night, and the futuristic inflection on everyday objects, objects which thus become talismanic. *La Chinoise* expresses Godard's "despair that that the radical politics of the time had surpassed the radicalism of his cinema" (309). More fundamentally, Godard had long seen "that the cinema that 'speculates in advance' on the spectator, even in the name of Hitchcock, is necessarily reactionary; that art made in a spirit of aesthetic freedom and progress was inherently inclined to the left; that the right was necessarily hostile to such art; and that a new, post-Communist left would necessarily be favorably disposed to it" (125). It may be that by the time *Cahiers* decided to turn Maoist, Maoism was a waning force in France (timing is everything). But the point remains that Brody's notion of the New Left of the 1960s as an offshoot or outgrowth of the cinematic New Wave is mind-boggling, and, remains, I submit, a thought to conjure with, much as Godard himself conjured with it in 1967.

PAUL THOMAS teaches politics at the University of California, Berkeley.

BOOK DATA Emilie Bickerton, *A Short History of "Cahiers du cinéma."* London: Verso, 2009. 156 pages. $22.95 cloth.

Richard Brody, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard.* New York: Henry Holt, 2008. 720 pages. $20.00 paper.

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

HISTORY *Film Quarterly* was founded in 1958 by the University of California Press and can thus claim to be the longest-running critical film magazine in the United States. The first issue was volume 12, number 1 because the new publication reincarnated two previous periodicals: *Hollywood Quarterly* (1945–51) and its follow-up, the *Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* (1951–57). The founding editor was Ernest Callenbach, who remained at the helm for thirty-three years. Ann Martin suceeded him in 1991 and steered *Film Quarterly* until 2005.

Film Quarterly is best described as a scholarly magazine, blending research and intelligent journalism, aimed at both specialist and general readers. *Film Quarterly* maintains strong ties with academic Film Studies nationwide (and internationally), as well as with other disciplines where film study thrives, but its intellectual agenda is independent.

Those interested in learning more about the evolution of the journal's editorial character can consult the archive of back issues on JSTOR (www.jstor.org). Two historical overviews are also recommended: the introduction by Brian Henderson to *Film Quarterly: Forty Years—An Introduction* (University of California Press, 1999), edited by Henderson and Ann Martin, and "Da Capo" by Ernest Callenbach, an essay published in the fiftieth anniversary issue (fall 2008). "Da Capo" is available online, together with several pieces from every recent issue as well as web exclusives, at www.filmquarterly.org.

In 2007, the layout of *Film Quarterly* was redesigned in order to accommodate shorter forms of writing (alongside reviews and features), notably columns and reports on festivals or urban film scenes. The rationale was summarized in the fall 2007 editorial: "The new formats . . . are meant to enhance *Film Quarterly*'s appeal to people who think seriously about movies, whether they do so inside or outside the academy. The crucial premise is that readability can be increased without compromising intellectual rigor—for surely compact lucidity, and indeed eloquence, are intellectual virtues."

The current, London-based editor works closely with the book review editor, who commissions dozens of reviews each year, and with members of the editorial board—distinguished scholars from several disciplines who help shape the journal's policies and also provide reader reports.

SUBMISSIONS *Film Quarterly* has a core group of contributors—writers-at-large, the chief book critic, columnists, members of the editorial board—and also welcomes submissions from writers, whether newcomers or veteran critics, striving to address a wide audience. Writing skill (or promise) and suitability are what matter, not institutional status or formal qualification.

Submissions are invited in the following categories: career overviews (4000–6000 words); round-up articles encompassing several films or filmmakers—especially articles which cover documentary or digital technology (4000–6000); interviews with filmmakers (2000–5000); reviews of newly released films or DVDs (2500–3500); opinion pieces, especially arguments about the state of film criticism or polemical responses to new films (1500–2500); festival or city reports (2000); book reviews (900). Please consult recent issues for examples of each format.

Inquiries about, and submissions of, book reviews should be addressed directly to Matthew H. Bernstein (mbernst@emory.edu—review copies should be mailed by publishers to: Matthew H. Bernstein, Emory University, Film Studies Department, 109 Rich Building, 1602 Fishburne Drive, Atlanta GA 30322).

All other submissions, pitches, and inquiries should be sent electronically to the editor (fq.submissions@gmail.com). The submitted piece or proposal must not be under consideration by another publication or submitted elsewhere until (in the event that the editor does not take the proposal forward) thirty days after submission to *Film Quarterly*. If the submission is part of a larger project, such as a forthcoming book, this should be stated in the covering remarks.

Film Quarterly has a policy on conflict of interests. When making a submission, prospective authors should mention if any person under discussion is an acquaintance of the author or if any other interest exists.

If accepted by the editor, articles and book reviews are read by two peer reviewers; film reviews and some reports and interviews are also sent out to at least one reader. The identity and institutional affiliation of authors are not disclosed to readers in order to ensure impartiality; reader comments relayed to authors are also anonymous. Once begun, the review process takes no longer than six weeks and is often completed more quickly. If an offer of publication is made, authors can expect further feedback from the editor, who has a hands-on approach.

Rob White (editor)